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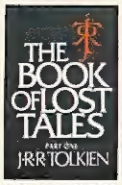


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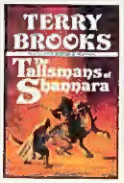


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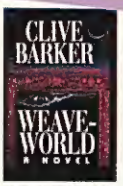


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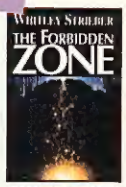


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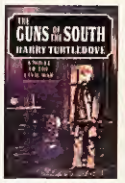


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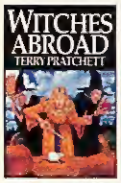


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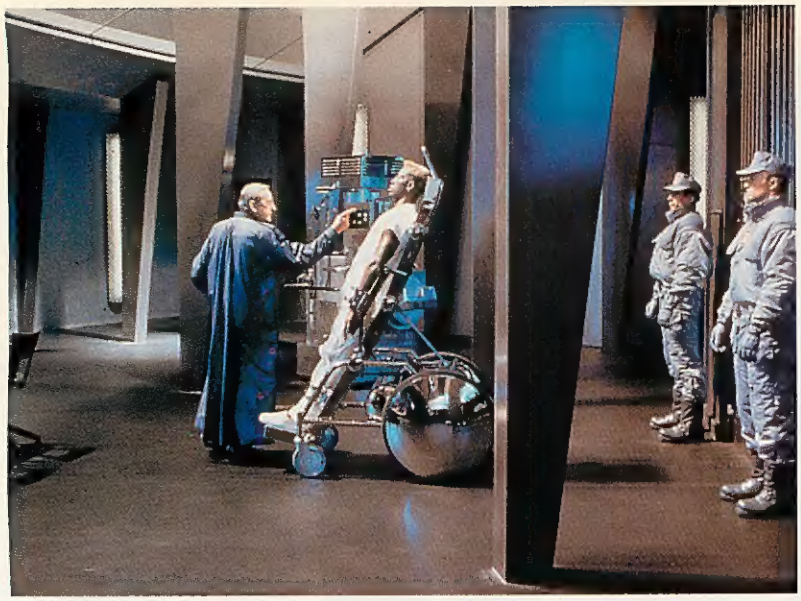

*COVER: Sometimes science fiction is simply a matter of time. A robot considers eternity, courtesy of Michael Whelan. ABOVE: Wesley Snipes, starring with Sylvester Stallone in the future thriller* Demolition Man, *wakes to an uncertain tomorrow. See page 20 for our exclusive coverage.*

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When we first started putting this collection together, this video was on everyone's list as a must to include. Made in 1951 and starring Michael Rennie, Patricia Neal and Hugh Marlow, this film finds Rennie as a visitor from another planet who is sent to warn earthlings of their self-destructive ways.

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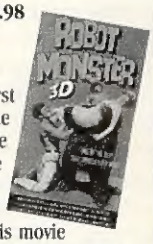

Whenever the subject of the worst movie ever made comes up this one is always mentioned! When it made its debut in 1953 the reviews were so bad its director attempted suicide. It's no wonder. You won't believe your eyes as you watch this movie about Ro-Man, an ape-like intergalactic exterminator wearing a plastic diving helmet. It gets worse! He attempts to vaporize the entire human population with his calcinator death ray (you have to check out this gun). Miraculously, six people survive and search for a way to destroy their flea-bitten tormentor. Contains 4 pair of 3-D glasses to share with friends and family.

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# LETTERS

Dear Mr. Edelman:

I'm 13 years old and a big fan of Isaac Asimov and Robert A. Heinlein. A few weeks ago, I did a report on SF for school. Your magazine was among my main sources of information. When I showed the magazines to my teacher, she quickly lost interest. She's one of those people who have a closed mind, and sees all SF as rubbish plagued with subliminal messages that are slowly turning us all in psychopathic homicidal maniacs. We more advanced human beings, who possess more open minds and know better, are very much aware that's not the case. You can imagine my surprise when a great deal of my classmates actually liked the magazine and started asking me for subscription information.

Thanks again for the wonderful magazine.

Christian Mondorf

*Sometimes it is the educators who most need educating, so we want to thank you for trying to open a few eyes in the classroom. Good luck!*

Dear Editor:

I was rather alarmed to find James Cameron's name absent from Di Filippo's list of the 50 most powerful people in Science Fiction. Some of the most successful (and arguably the best) science fiction films of the past decade, *The Terminator*, *Aliens*, *The Abyss* and *Terminator 2*, were both written and directed by James Cameron. In his collaborative efforts with producer Gale Ann Hurd, Cameron has significantly contributed to the sophistication and the art of science fiction films. I realize that with this type of list one always risks omitting someone's favorite author or movie-personality. But to list Schwarzenegger as an influential sci-fi personage and neglect Cameron altogether is either a severe clerical error or a blundering oversight.

Joel A. Hoekstra

Dear Mr. Edelman:

After reading your September issue from cover to cover, I can happily state that *Science Fiction Age* has the best balance of articles and stories I have ever encountered. I do have one small bone to pick with Damian Kilby, who wrote the book review on the republication of Heinlein's *Podkayne of Mars*. Mr. Kilby asserts that "the novel contains certain flaws which might make it hard for some modern readers to take seriously," and further states: "By current standards, the book falls flat on its face with its handling of issues of sexual equality." The assumption is that Heinlein was merely reflecting the sexual and cultural taboos of his time, and committed gaffes on the subject of women's rights due to the ignorance of his 1950s mentality that we enlightened moderns can only shake our heads at with quiet amusement.

With all respect to Mr. Kilby, this patronizing view betrays a basic misunderstanding of Heinlein's purpose. Yes, the culture of Mars in Heinlein's novel is puritanical and restrictive. It is designed so in order to contrast more strongly with the wild, uninhibited culture of Venus. Neither culture is intended to be taken for the "correct" culture, or the "true" culture — they are merely different social arrangements that have arisen on two planets at a particular moment of future time. When Mr. Kilby writes that Podkayne is "not very convincing as the voice of a teen from the future," he is assuming our '90s society is somehow more correct than the societies preceding it, and that the opinions on sexual mores and social conventions now in fashion will continue.

What colossal conceit! If history shows us anything, it is that sexual customs run in cycles. The restriction of social behavior that defined the Victorian age was a direct reaction by intellectuals to the moral looseness of the Romantic era. I submit to Mr. Kilby that we have no reason to believe our current cultural views on sexual freedom and the right of women to pursue the same professions as men will continue forever. Just the opposite. If anything is certain, it is that at some time in the not too distant future we will be living in a society so sexually restrictive and so intellectually censured that it will make the 1950s look like the decadence of ancient Rome.

Heinlein, who was quite capable of creating a thousand unique worlds, understood that his society was neither the best nor the inevitable future culture. More importantly, he knew that it could evolve in two ways: it might become more sexually and intellectually permissive (as we have watched it do for the past few decades), or just as easily it might grow more prudish and inhibited. In making the Martian culture puritanical, Heinlein was not saying "this is the way it should be," but was saying that on Mars at that particular moment in time, "this is the way it is."

Donald Tyson

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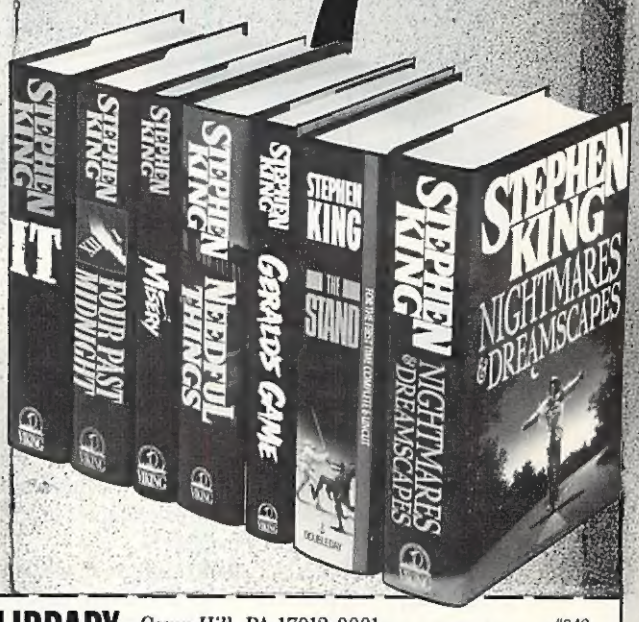

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## EDITORIAL

*By Scott Edelman*

# Some SF tries to answer the question, "What is Science Fiction anyway?"

*Barry N. Malzberg (right), seated with Harlan Ellison on a convention panel in 1973, is the undisputed King of "recursive" SF. Photo by Jay Kay Klein.*

WHY IS IT THAT WE READ SCIENCE FICTION? What is it that we're looking for there? Some have written lengthy essays attempting to pin down the appeal of the genre. But there are other writers who are trying to figure out the answer to that question by writing a special brand of science fiction which is called "recursive" science fiction, that is, stories that are not only Sf in and of themselves, but manage to be *about* SF.

The late James Blish has called this form "incestuous" SF, and Barry N. Malzberg (more about him later) has called the sub-genre "decadent" SF. These other descriptions do have their validity, but the one which has stuck when fans and writers get together to talk shop about this self-referential form is "recursive" SF.

You've read recursive science fiction if you've read *Fallen Angels*, by Jerry Pournelle, Larry Niven and Michael Flynn, in which the political underground that saves future earth is not made up of members of Greenpeace, the Republican National Committee or ACT-UP, but rather science fiction fandom. You've read recursive SF if you read John Kessel's short story "Invaders" (recently collected as the final piece in *The Norton Book of Science Fiction*), in which a bespectacled SF writer, clearly the author himself, manages to save the Incas from the encroaching Spaniards. You've read recursive SF if you've read Michael Bishop's novel *The Secret Ascension*, which featured fellow SF writer Philip K. Dick returning from an alternate world afterlife to save us all from a totalitarian regime.

But perhaps the most frequent practitioner of recursive SF is Barry N. Malzberg, who has written numerous novels and short stories about SF writers, such as *Herovit's World* and *Gather in the Hall of Planets*, the latter of which was set at a science fiction convention. His short story in this issue, "The Passage of the Light," is a sequel to perhaps the most famous of recursive short stories, "Corridors."

"Corridors," which became a finalist for the Nebula Award in 1983, tells the tale of Henry Martin Ruthven, a middle-aged SF writer spending a weekend as a Guest of Honor at the World Science Fiction Convention in Cincinnati. Ruthven's novel series *The Sorcerer* has made him extremely popular and financially well-off, but he has little respect for the work that has brought him fame. He realizes that his best work is behind him, and that he is cranking out hack work. What those who surround him during the World Con weekend do not know is that he is struggling with a crisis of faith and a love-hate relationship with our genre. For years Ruthven has thought of writing a non-fiction book about SF titled The Lies of Science Fiction, but he has always abandoned the project, and when he goes to make his guest of honor speech, all of his confused emotions about SF bubble to the surface, and he can barely finish his speech to the crowd of 3,000. "And then," Malzberg writes in the final line of the story, "In hopeless and helpless fury, Ruthven pushes aside the microphone and cries."

For over a decade, SF fans have wondered what happened to writer Henry Martin Ruthven after his breakdown at the podium in "Corridors." In this issue, Malzberg takes us on a journey to let us see how Ruthven went on, in yet another one of his stories that attempts to make us understand why we love science fiction the way we do.

And to you, our readers, who also love science fiction, we at *Science Fiction Age* want to thank you for your support on the occasion of, this, our first anniversary issue, our largest issue yet. During my lifetime of reading SF, I have seen many genre magazines fold long before completing a year of publication. Some titles have passed from the field without putting out even a second issue. That is why the success of *Science Fiction Age* is so special to me, because it shows that all of you out there — our readers and subscribers, as well as the writers, artists and advertisers who fill our pages — realize that the world is ready for a new kind of science fiction magazine, one that seeks out the best in SF wherever it appears. We couldn't have done it without you. And if you think our premiere year was breathtaking, be sure to stay with us in the months and years to come, as we continue to break Sturgeon's law. □

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CORRECTION: Our September Gallery section featured work from the breathtaking new book, *The Art of Michael Whelan*, due out in November from Bantam. In error, we referred to the book by it's subtitle, Scenes/Visions. We recently saw an advance copy of the lavishly produced book, sure to be the SF artworlds publishing event of the season. Be sure to ask your bookseller for it by the correct title.

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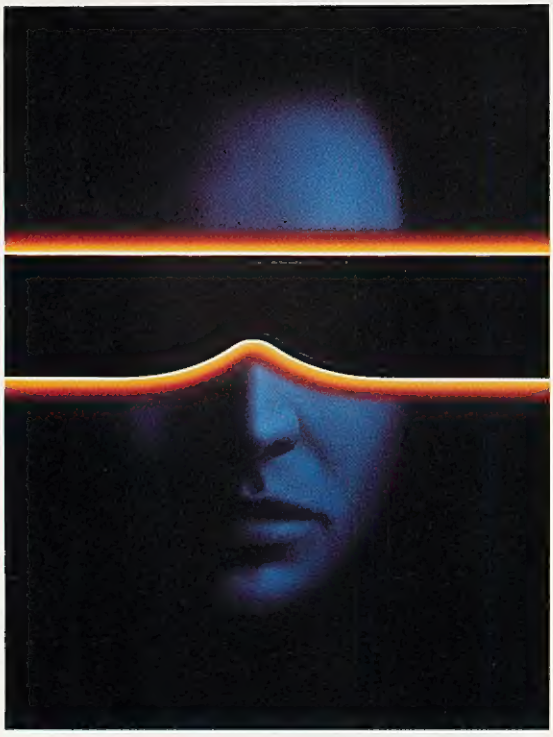
*By Gregory A. Feeley*

# Cyberpunk's father adds a dash of humor to the mean streets of tomorrow.



*William Gibson learns how to laugh in his latest techno-thriller. Cover art by Don Brautigam.*

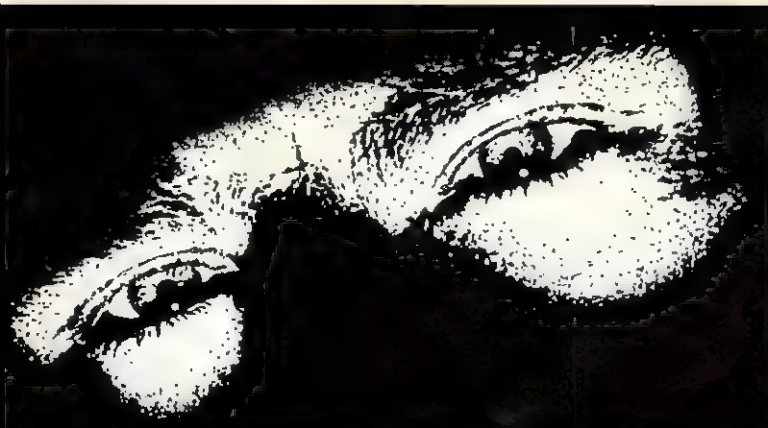
WILLIAM GIBSON'S FIRST SOLO NOVEL IN FIVE years, *Virtual Light* (Bantam Spectra, 1993, 325 pp, hardcover, $21.95), slides through the reader's mind like a geometrically perfect ice sculpture: glistening, immensely polished, its passage unimpeded by any surface irregularity. Like *Count Zero*, it is slicker, more smoothly constructed and less ambitious than the novel that preceded it. Readers who were dismayed by the kaleidoscopic and brooding *The Difference Engine* (as many of Gibson's admirers surprisingly were) will be cheered, for *Virtual Light* offers a milieu similar to that of the Sprawl novels, a hotly sought MacGuffin, a sustained chase scene that accelerates into a headlong climax, and a narrative every feature of which is out on the surface, to be admired like chrome finish. More surprising (and more welcome), the book is extremely funny.

This deadpan, understated whimsy—manifesting in the auctorial voice rather than in the narrative action—suffuses *Virtual Light*, for all that its plot could be translated, point for point, into a Hollywood action-adventure devoid of irony or a glimmer of humor. Berry Rydell, a cashiered ex-cop living in the middle of the next decade (the dust jacket confidently puts it at 2005), loses his fallback job as a security guard for IntenSecure when he is caught in the coils of an elaborate scam involving one of IntenSecure's wealthy Los Angeles clients, a tale lovingly detailed in the novel's first long chapter, "Cruising with Gunhead." Deprived of a career in "armed response" and unwilling to accept the next step down (guarding shopping malls), Rydell takes a temporary job as a driver for a San Francisco skip-tracer, who is investigating an unspecified theft that has rattled some corporate powers ("Singapore, man, they're in some kind of serious twist about it.").

What Rydell doesn't know (although the reader does, having followed Gibson's other plot line in alternate chapters) is that the theft was the impulsive grabbing by Chevette Washington, a young bike messenger, of a pair of sunglasses from the pocket of a foreign courier who had behaved obnoxiously toward her. The courier has already been murdered horribly for his dereliction, the unsuspecting Chevette is being stalked by a corporate mercenary, and the ingenuous Rydell (as close to a young innocent as one is likely ever to find in Gibson's fiction) is on his way into more trouble than he has ever known. *Virtual Light* (the title refers to the technology behind the stolen sunglasses, which show scenes of planned corporate malfeasance through direct electrical stimulation of the optic nerves) presents a gleaming surface of brand names and vivid imagery (while working for IntenSecure, Rydell drives a six-wheeled Hotspur Hussar, an armored Land Rover that looked "sort of like something you'd see in an Episcopal church. Not too much gilt on the logo. Sort of restrained.").

Gibson's method, here as elsewhere, is to present a stylized surface that manages, through the artful presentation of tellingly exaggerated detail, to compel a sense of verisimilitude, as though one were being vouchsafed a documentary image of America a decade or a century from now. It is a measure of Gibson's stylistic power that he is frequently credited with skills he does not possess (such as social insight or technological expertise) by readers who have "seen the future" in his masterfully constructed finish.

Much of this surface finish has been created from elements that readers will recognize from previous work. Just as Rubin of "The Winter Market" created gomi art from fragments and detritus—"One box is filled with the severed heads of hundreds of Barbie dolls, another with armored industrial safety gauntlets that look like space suit gloves"—Gibson has assembled *Virtual Light* from colorful bits of his earlier fiction. The chapter in which the suave, imperturbable crime figure Warbaby takes a benign interest in Rydell recalls corresponding moments between Beauvoir and Bobby in *Count Zero*; while the religion of Bobby's mother, who puts up holograms of "Jesus or Hubbard or some shit" in his room, bears a generic resemblance to the faith of Rydell's partner's mother, whose cult of choice seeks the essence of God in watching old TV movies. Such duplication occurs up and down the wavelength, from the structural level (repeating the swift-paced, converging multi-track plotline design of *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*) to those of tiny details (such as a passing reference to a rough customer named "Bunny"). If



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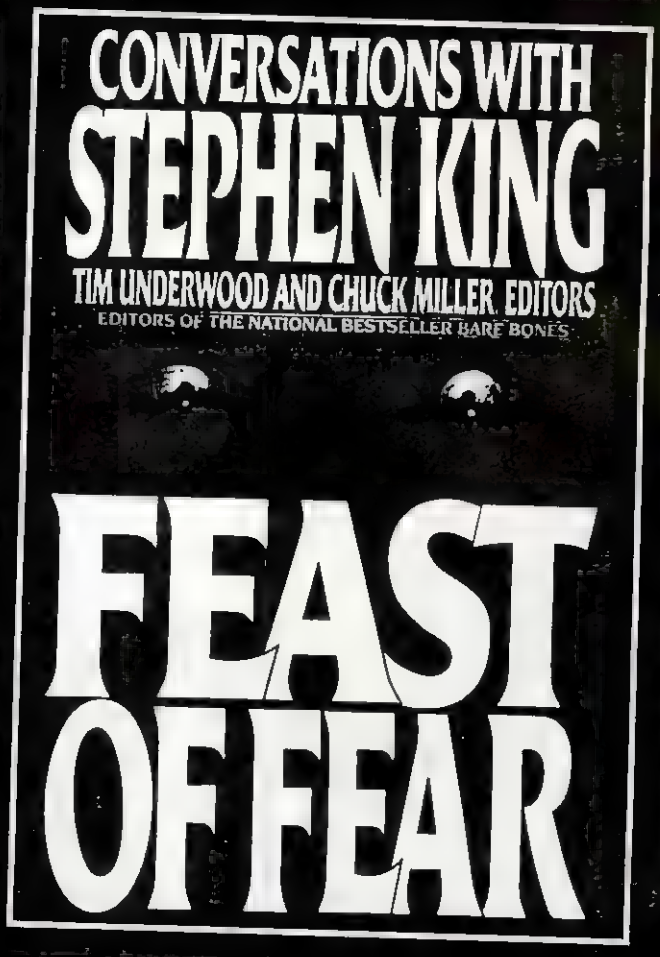


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characters throughout Gibson's fiction—Rubin, Slick Henry in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the AI that makes Cornell-like constructs in *Count Zero*—are consistently creating art from leftover pieces and oddments, it should not surprise anyone that Gibson should try it himself.

As with Gibson's earlier novels, *Virtual Light* is shaky in its scientific details: Gibson refers to "cryogenic" freezing of defunct Californians when he means "cryonic" (he also seems to have misremembered the salient detail of modern economy-minded cryonicists: they can now freeze a client's *head*, not his brain), and makes much of a high-tech forensic product called Kil'Z, used to sanitize especially bloody crime scenes ("It was an anti-viral agent, capable of nuking HIV's 1 through 5, Crimean-Congo, Mokola fever, Tarzana dengue, and the Kansas City flu.") without apparently appreciating how well invitro viruses can be killed with bleach. Much of the book seems cut from the standard near-future cyberpunk scenario: the balkanization of the industrial world (Northern and Southern California are separate states, Canada has splintered into numerous entities, as have most of the European nations mentioned in passing); the polarization of the economic spectrum into the powerful rich and an underclass of desperate or colorful hustlers; and the apparent disappearance of the world's major religions in favor of odd cults. Most of these can fairly be called imaginative failures, the default options of the scenario program that the modern SF writer runs in his head when constructing a new future. In a writer with fewer stylistic resources than Gibson, this would prove a crippling liability.

Here, however, it doesn't greatly matter. In its expert pacing, assured voice, and laconic eye for the varieties of exotic low-life, *Virtual Light* reads like nothing so much as a near-future Elmore Leonard novel. It does not attempt to shake up the field as *Neuromancer* and *The Difference Engine* did, but neither is it the exercise in marking place that *Mona Lisa Overdrive* was. As Gibson's definitive and (one hopes) final venture into the technosleaze mean streets of tomorrow, it sends up his corporate mercenaries and tough street women with wit, style, and a hip self-awareness. *Virtual Light* is a splendid read, and a good point from which Gibson can, now, move on. ■

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**Fossil,** *by Hal Clement, DAW Books, 1993, 288 pp, paperback, $4.99.*

A few years ago, as one of his last projects before his death, the late Isaac Asimov created the background for a series of shared-universe anthologies, published in paperback by Avon Books. Titled "Isaac's Universe" and edited by Martin H. Greenberg, the series ran through three volumes and included original stories commissioned from a number of SF authors both long-established (such as Hal Clement) and new to the genre (e.g., this reviewer).

In essence, Dr. Asimov's universe consists of a Milky Way galaxy populated by six star-faring races, of which *homo sapiens* is the upstart newcomer. Although there are diplomatic and economic rivalries among the Six Races, they coexist peacefully. One of the series' original contributors, Robert Silverberg, suggested an additional feature which inadvertantly became the focal point for many of the stories that followed: a mysterious unseen Seventh Race which had roamed the galaxy prior to the emergence of the other six before disappearing for reasons unknown, leaving behind all sorts of invaluable relics and tantalizing clues.

As an anthology series, "Isaac's Universe" was no more or less successful than the many other shared universes which had preceded it. It had the disadvantage common to other literary round-robins: contributors were restrained by the series guidelines and could not do anything that would destroy the rationale for another author's story. As a result, there was little room for freewheeling extrapolation; the fact that the author had to limit his or her tale to novelette-length at best didn't help matters much, either.

Hal Clement has found a partial solution for this creative conundrum: he has written the first full-length novel set in "Isaac's Universe." Although *Fossil* has the major drawback of being dependent upon the previous


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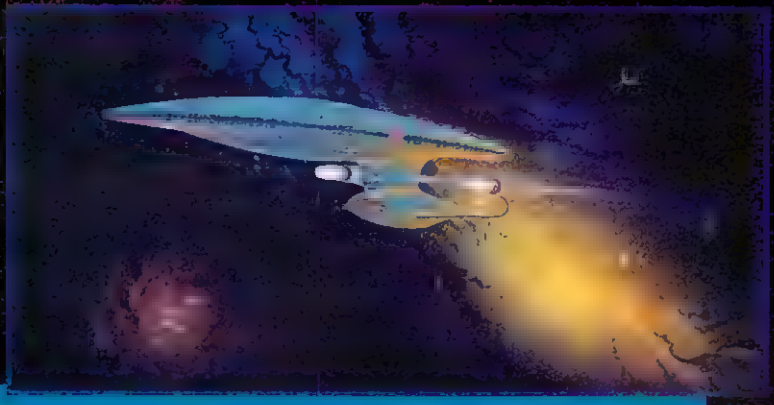

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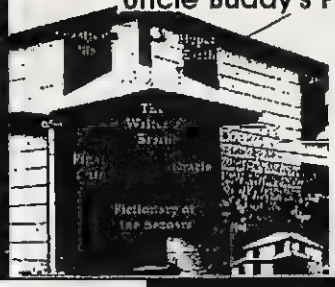

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anthologies—the reader must have read at least a couple of the previous stories in order to fully understand what's happening in this novel—it also has the advantage of length. When an author is given liberty to write as long as one chooses, the only real limit is imagination.

Imagination has never been a problem for Clement. For many years now, he has been unsurpassed at the art of world-building, as aptly demonstrated by classics like *Mission of Gravity* and *Cycle of Fire;* perhaps more than any other author involved in the original series, he is perfectly suited for working within "Isaac's Universe." Although most of the aliens in *Fossil* were originally devised by Asimov, the planet where the story takes place is unmistakably a Clement creation. Habranha is a small world with such an extremely dense atmosphere that human explorers can only survive by breathing oxygenated liquid (otherwise, atmospheric pressure would crush their armored suits and habitats). Moreover, the planet's axial rotation is locked with its solar primary, resulting in a relatively warm, oceanic dayside and a frozen, windswept nightside.

It is at a small outpost on the nightside that an expedition comprised of members of the Six Races is seeking clues as to the origins of the Seventh Race. Within one of the many pits dug within the icy lithosphere has been found a fossilized wing, which tends to suggest that the native Habras, themselves an insectile-winged species, are descendents of the Seventh Race. The Habras, an intelligent but non-spacefaring race, can offer assistance but provide no real clues; it's up to the alien investigators to solve this particular riddle. Yet some of the expedition delegates are apparently following hidden agendas, and it doesn't help that the planet itself is relentlessly inhospitable to all of the Six Races.

The intrigue escalates when a long-range surface rover crashes into the camp, driven by autopilot and containing the ice-encased corpse of a long-dead Habra. When the novel's human protagonist, expedition safety officer Hugh Cedar and his wife Janice, investigate the rover, they find that two humans and two aliens were once passengers, but all four of them vanished somewhere along the way, leaving the rover to find its way to the campsite. This sets up an ingenious, question-upon-question mystery that provides much of the novel's thrust.

*Fossil* isn't a novel for everyone, at least not in today's variegated SF audience. This is a classic hard-SF puzzle story of the sort which used to predominate the genre when *Astounding/Analog* was still the leading science fiction magazine, and as such it's a type of novel which has become rather unfashionable lately. Some readers will dig this book and some won't, and so be it; the ones who don't should look elsewhere for entertainment. On the other hand, those who like this kind of novel will enjoy *Fossil,* and I

whole-heartedly recommend it to readers who complain that no one writes SF in the grand tradition anymore.

Gee, it's nice to see that Hal Clement is still going strong after all these years. And, yes, I think the Good Doctor would have approved of what's been done in his absence.

**Allen Steele**

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**Godspeed,** *by Charles Sheffield, Tor Books, 1993, 352 pp, hardcover, $21.95.*

There are always trends in science fiction. Take '60s New Wave, which taught scientification what a meta was phor. Or the Tolkien craze, which led to an endless efflorescence of vast epics romanticizing a feudal worldview. (As if our ancestors never struggled so that we'd be spared the tyranny of kings. Ah, irony.) Meanwhile, military SF splatters vast, silent space explosions across compact vistas of tortured spacetime, for the delectation of yet another, insatiable sub-audience.

More recently, urban fantasy has been a welcome bridge to the literature of daily life. And, of course, there lingers (despite rumors of its death) cyberpunk—once and future dour darling of that discriminating set which claims to know what "deconstructionism" means.

Some trends seem sober and earnest. Environmental consciousness might be said to have begun within the bosom of science fiction, certainly as a deeply committed polemical form. Wilhelm, Harrison, Brunner, and so many others created a literary movement with their deeply moving paeans to what we all might lose if humans remain committed to stupidity.

But what of science fiction's heart, the sub-genre wherein its soul of souls resides? I refer to *hard SF*—that foundation first laid by Jules Verne and 1920s radio magazines—on which all the rest of the rickety, hypermodern-gothic-rococo-psychedelic edifice relies for support. Science fiction in which *science* takes pride of place, unapologetically speculative and unabashedly, cloud-cuckoo in love with the universe of unexplored possibilities.

Any trends in sight? I mean besides the oft-repeated mantra of die-hard curmudgeons who proclaim each year that, "hard SF is dead."

There is one tendency I can point to, one pitch and yaw I perceive in the works of more and more authors. To some, it may seem a good sign, portending the end of puerile, pimply adolescence and the onset

# Books to Watch For

**Isaac Asimov's Robots in Time #3: Warrior,** *by William F. Wu* (AvoNova). The song is over, but the melody lingers on. Wu, a writer to watch even when going it solo, here continues in a robotic vein for those who must have their fix of things Asimovian.

**Planet of Adventure,** *by Jack Vance* (Tor). The four hard-to-find books of Vance's space opera saga are collected in one omnibus volume. If you've been searching in vain for *City of the Chasch, Servants of the Wankh, The Dirdir* and *The Pnume*, this is your lucky month.

**The Further Adventures of Superman,** *edited by Martin H. Greenberg* (Bantam). The last son of Krypton gets the text-only treatment from the likes of Diane Duane, Karen Haber, Mike Resnick, Henry Slesar, and Edward Wellen, with an introduction by Dave Gibbons.

**The Nitpicker's Guide for Next Generation Trekkers,** *by Phil Farrend* (Dell). Amaze your friends by learning everything there is to know about the series that proved once and for all that Trek will never die.

**The Positronic Man,** *by Isaac Asimov and Robert Silverberg* (Doubleday Foundation). Turning his hand to one of the Good Doctor's best robot tales, Silverberg continues with his experiment of turning classic Asimov tales into fully-fleshed novels.

**The Exploits of Solar Pons,** *by August Derleth* (Fedogan & Bremer). The founder of Arkham House may be best remembered as the author of the many adventures of Solar Pons, the most interesting of the Sherlock Holmes clones. The cream of the crop are collected here.

**A Wizard's Dozen,** *edited by Michael Stearns* (Harcourt Brace). A baker's dozen of 13 tales from the likes of fantasy favorites Jane Yolen, Bruce Coville, Will Shetterly and Charles de Lint, including the fantasy title of the year, "The Princess Who Kicked Butt."

**The Norton Book of Science Fiction,** *by LeGuin, Attebery and Fowler* (Norton). This distinguished editorial trio has put together a filet mignon anthology that will undoubtedly become the standard textbook for college courses in SF for the next decade. The best of the best.

**The Alternative Detective,** *by Robert Sheckley* (Tor). This cross-over novel will be of interest to fans of both SF and mystery, as this early editor of *Omni* spoofs the detective field by sending an acidhead sleuth on a cryptic mission.

**Once Upon A Time in the East,** *by Lionel Fenn* (Ace). The creator of Kent Montana turns his typewriter to the not so old west, bringing an 1880s gunslinger to 1990s New York, where he cleans up Times Square, and then takes a stab at New Jersey, too.


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of *maturity* for SF. To others, the news may bring only mourning for the loss of an old friend. Here it is.

Hyperdrive. FTL. Warp speed. They're all dead, Jim. Or dying before our eyes.

What happened? It was our finest toy, our brightest bauble, our hope. Ever since Doc Smith tried tangling with Einstein, and got mangled for his trouble, we have set our caps upon finding ways to fool, cheat, and outmaneuver old Albert, spinning scenarios to twist the esty of spacetime, to punch holes through its fabric and sew it back together to suit us.

Faced with the sheer immensity of this vastly bloated, oversized cosmos, it was our grail, a way to go visit the stars without filing, two by two, aboard lost arks. When someone sagely advised hard SF writers to concentrate on "only one major element-of-wonder per book," he or she added, in small print, "Of course, that doesn't count the warp drive. *That's* a gimme!"

Anybody in his or her right mind hates growing up, but it happens anyway.. If Albert Einstein ain't yet forgiven, more of us are at least starting to listen to him. We are slowly learning to live with the notion of a relativistic universe.

We can still head out there; we may even go boldly. It just won't be easy. And tearful farewells at the spacedock really will be *adieu.*

Enter Charles Sheffield, arguably the purest living practitioner of the hard SF craft. Maven of the "what-if..." scenario.

Enter Charles Sheffield, arguably the purest living practitioner of the hard SF craft. Maven of the "what-if..." scenario. Master of *gedankenexperiment.* If toying with ways to fool Uncle Albert is a sin, no one shall endure more time-dilated purgatory than Sheffield. To the delight of countless eager, fascinated readers, he has stretched and stitched spacetime 11 and 40 ways, convincing us (for a while, at least) that each one of those ways is right.

His love affair was passionate, but now one wonders...is it over so soon?

With *Godspeed,* his latest novel from Tor Books, Sheffield seems to be writing a eulogy. Sayonara warp. So long, spin dizzies.

The people of planet Erin once had the key, so his story reveals. Before the Isolation, their trade network covered thousands of stars, all linked by dazzling ships equipped with the Godspeed Drive. Now Erin sits alone, save for the 40 barren worlds of Mauveen System, still visited tortuously by a caste of Spacers, men who pick through the planetoids seeking light elements to make life on Erin possible. None of the short-range ships are new. All date from before the Isolation ended interstellar contact, and nearly finished civilization on Erin.

There was no warning. One day, the ships just stopped coming.

The story of Jay Hara—a boy who longs to be a Spacer, and becomes a man the hard way—is an adventure tale with solid strengths. A story that rollicks, rockets, and rolls through suspenseful confrontations and surprises. Who is the stranger in Jay's mother's house, who rents a room with a view across the lake to Muldoon Spaceport? Who are the two men the stranger fears, one with no arms and the other with no legs? From the beginning, tension is well maintained and Sheffield manages that special magic of keeping the reader worried about the protagonist's survival, even though the narrative is written in first person past tense.

In other words, Charles Sheffield knows how to tell a story, and tell it well. No big news there. If the blistering pace and rapid conclusion of *Godspeed* leaves you puzzled by unanswered questions—Who *was* Jay's mysterious father? Who created the asteroid world called Paddy's Fortune? What happened to the folk of the Eye, who built the Slowdrive?—and if you'd have liked to see a lot more than tantalizing glimpses of the cul-


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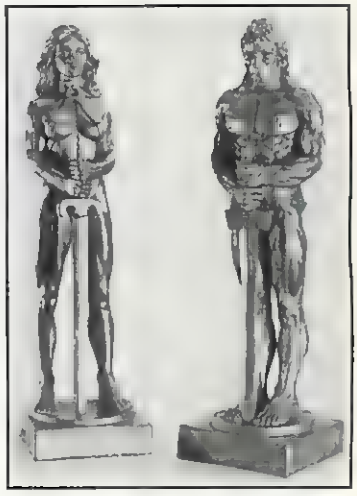

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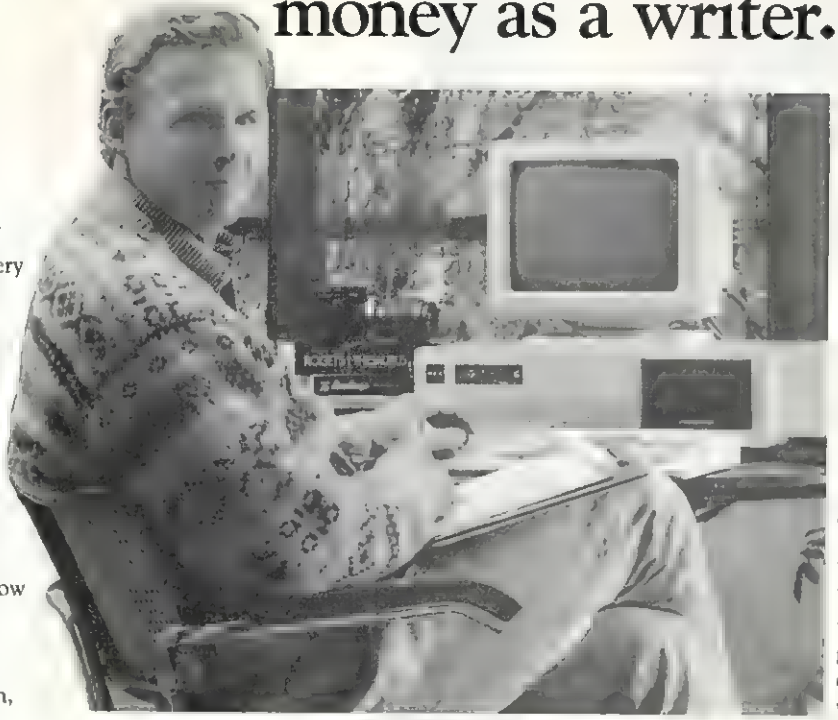

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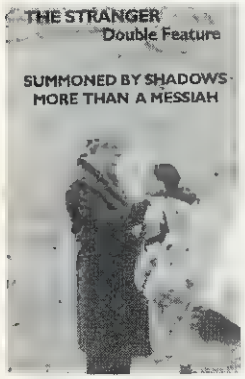


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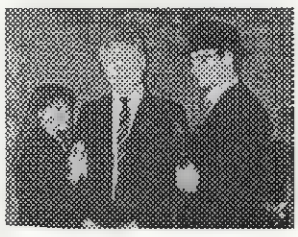

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ture, government, and history of planet Erin, that's a tribute to the way Sheffield laces even a brief adventure yarn like this one with hints suggesting a much bigger, more vivid world. This is a book you can easily finish before that work assignment, or school essay, is due. If you want an epic's lingering, spendthrift detail, set aside a solid week and buy something by Simmons. *This* book is in a hurry, like its hero.

To me, the thing that stands out about *Godspeed* is not its many routine competencies, but the unexpected and the untraditional in its resolution of what happened back in Erin's misty past, when the ships stopped coming. Yes, at first it seems to be a fairly standard story involving a quest for a wonderful McGuffin—a marvelous thingummy that, if found, will make everybody rich and honored and their mothers proud.

But then we actually find out....

Oh, nevermind that. What moved me was the *feeling* of the conclusion, a poignant mix of mysterious loss and hope. As Jay Hara grew up in the book, one sensed the sadness of having to put away the toys of childhood.

Ah, they've been *such* great toys! From time to time, I think I'll still use them, all the warps 'n' jump points 'n' wormholes 'n' stuff. Not always, though. And never with the same, pure élan.

Grownups, to our melancholy joy, often must move on to more pragmatic, less hormonally instant hopes than those fiery dreams of youth. But then, unlike warp drive, those hopes may be based on stronger stuff, the fabric of reality.

**David Brin**

---

**Nimbus,** *by Alexander Jabokolov, AvoNova/Morrow, 384 pp, hardcover, $22.00.*

Now that Billy Idol has, in 1993, released a CD entitled *Cyberpunk*, it's clear that those of us who were actually there at the creation, so to speak, can no longer use the term in polite society.

This raises a serious question, however. When one reads a book set in the not too distant future in which the protagonists communicate via a world-wide data net, indulge in neuro- and sensory-enhancing implants and drugs, live in a rundown city torn asunder by various special interest groups, and talk to one another in cryptic technospeak, what do you call it?

Since I'm not here to coin an entirely new name for this subgenre, why don't we go with Norman Spinrad's clever "neuromantics," since in the case of *Nimbus*, it actually fits the book considerably better than "cyberpunk." There's not an awful lot of actual "cyber" in here. Sure, the protagonists are hooked in, but the bulk of the book's plot concerns hacking through a much more volatile and dangerous landscape: the human brain.

Peter Ambrose (nee Theo Bronkman) is

what you might call an amateur neurosurgeon. He operates (literally) out of his basement, installing high-tech, neuro-enhancing micro-hardware in the brains of a variety of clients, mainly corporate CEO's who want to be able to process data and communicate with the Net more efficiently. He's very good at what he does, even if he's not entirely clear on why he does it. All goes along well until the day his TV, for no apparent reason, wakes him with the holographic display of a brutally murdered corpse. This concerns him, because he realizes that he must have programmed the set to certain parameters that he no longer recalls, requesting it to show him this particular corpse, should it ever turn up. Why would he do such a thing, and why can't he remember doing it? The only possible answer stares him in the face when the alarms continue to alert him to danger, he begins to recall a bit of his past.

Back in the days when he was called Theo Bronkman, he was part of a top-secret military research group called Nimbus. Drafted into service during the Devolution Wars, the seven-member group had been assigned to "turn" enemy soldiers, to make them truly believe that they were fighting on the wrong side. Much of the neuro-hardware Ambrose is installing today was developed by him and his compatriots in a dingy military compound called Camp Fitzwater.

After the Wars ended, the Group split up, going their several ways, thinking—erroneously, as it turns out—that they were free. Now the members of the Group are turning up dead, and Theo Bronkman knows that if he cannot get his memories of those days reinserted, he'll most likely be next.

If you like your films *noir*, your tech-level high, and your plots as intricately woven as an Yemeni prayer rug, *Nimbus* is the book you've been waiting for since you finished your last reading of *The Maltese Falcon*.

Alexander Jaboklov has shown himself to be one of science fiction's most skilled stylists, and he proves his talent once again in *Nimbus*. The writing is terrific—he builds a mood as well as anyone writing today, and the plethora of incredible science fictional concepts is truly amazing..

Jaboklov has shown himself to be one of science fiction's most skilled stylists, and he proves his talent once again in *Nimbus*.

One idea that I found particularly disturbing was the concept of office personas. In order to avoid security leaks, high-tech firms give their most responsible personnel alternate personalities for their business hours. The core personality knows absolutely nothing about what goes on in the office, so no sensitive information can be leaked via pillow or any other sort of off-the-job talk. Of course, no technology is without its little *flaws*, and this one has some doozies, as the reader will discover.

Just as no technology is without flaw, however, neither is this book. I found the level of tech-speak turned up about five notches too high for my personal comfort, though, of course, you may feel differently. This is not to say that readers lacking an advanced degree in neuroscience will be unable to garner any pleasure from *Nimbus*. Hardly. The book's pleasures are manifold, and reside mainly in the writer's ability to create a startling future society that feels as real and plausible as the one outside our windows. A little case of culture shock is a small price to pay for a trip like this one. Billy Idol, are you listening?

**Shawna McCarthy**

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**RECENT AND RECOMMENDED**

•If Hannes Bok were alive today, we like to think his art would be a major part of *Science Fiction Age*. Bok was the first winner of a Best Artist Hugo in 1953, and in his day, he illustrated the stories of many of the writers

*Continued on page 78*


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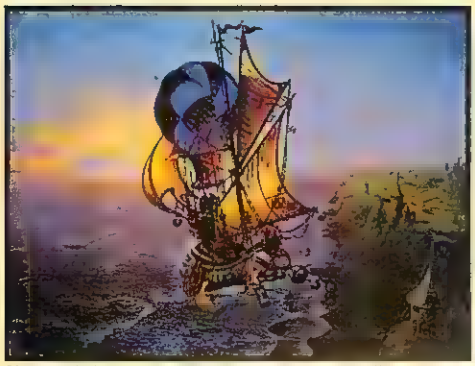

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*By Kyle Counts*

# Join *Demolition Man* Sylvester Stallone on the set of his near future SF thriller.

*Sylvester Stallone as LAPD Sgt. John Spartan, brings peace to the future LA/SF megalopolis, but he might have to destroy it to do so.*

"IN THE FUTURE," SAID MY GUIDE, "THERE IS NO VIolence, there is no war, there is no profanity, and there are no guns. Anything that is 'bad' has been outlawed, so people now come to this museum to see what you and I see every day."

As evidenced by the rubble of red brick and shattered neon signs, offset by a battered 1966 Buick Skylark, this is not your typical L.A. County Museum tour. It is instead a tour of the fictional Museum of Art and History, circa 2032, one of many sets production designer David Snyder has created for Warner Bros.' science fiction action-adventure drama *Demolition Man*.

Only a few days before, according to my "tour guide," *Demolition Man* coproducer Jackie George, leads Sylvester Stallone and Wesley Snipes filmed a complicated fight scene here on Stage 15 of the studio's Burbank, California lot. That found them falling through the museum's plexiglass floor and landing atop the vintage model Buick, which no doubt accounted for its shattered windshield. The room is part of the museum's Hall of Violence wing, which pays reluctant tribute to pre-Great Earthquake Los Angeles, a period of history marked by widespread violence and social unrest.

"This," George continues, "is the new Los Angeles—called San Angeles—which stretches from Santa Barbara to San Diego. It is a peaceful, law-abiding metropolis, where the most the police have to deal with is the occasional jaywalker."

Into this homogenized setting are thrown two men from 1996 who threaten to turn San Angeles into a smoldering pile of rubble: psychopathic mass murderer Simon Phoenix (Snipes) and LAPD Sgt. John Spartan (Stallone). Stallone's character has become known as the "Demolition Man" due to his uncanny ability to demolish anything that gets in the way of his pursuit of dangerous escaped felons.

"When Wesley Snipes is unleashed in the future, he comes to the museum because it's the only place in San Angeles where you can find weapons," George explains. "There are no guns anymore—the police use stun batons because there's really no more violence in the future. So Wesley gets into the museum's Armory Room and totally encompasses himself in weapons, both of the past and the future. Stallone finds him there, they have a huge fight, and they crash through the floor and land on this Buick Skylark. As you can see, this set doesn't look too different from downtown Los Angeles in some places."

The outline of Peter Lenkov's story (as scripted by Dan Waters, who wrote *Batman Returns)* is that Phoenix and Spartan are sent to prison when a skirmish between them during L.A. Riot III results in the death of 30 innocent hostages Phoenix has taken. Both men are shipped off to the California CryoPenitentiary, where they are sentenced to 70 years of sub-zero rehabilitation designed to turn them into benign John Q. Citizens.

But the enigmatic Master Planner Raymond Cocteau (Nigel Hawthorne), the brains behind the behaviorial engineering therapy that seemingly has eradicted all crime and violence, has another plan for Phoenix. He wants to use Phoenix to assassinate the rebel leader of an underground movement that is threatening his reign of power. That's when Spartan, the only man alive equipped to deal with the diabolical likes of Phoenix, is thawed out and given the chance to redeem himself by using whatever means are available to collar the killer and restore order to this strange new world.

Says George, "His plan is for him to kill a character named Edgar Friendly (played by Denis Leary of MTV fame), who is the leader of the Wasteland. The Wasteland is an underground area of San Angeles where all the rebels live. No one knows about this place because Cocteau has kept it very quiet. They aren't bad people. They are just nonconformists who have tried to survive and keep their own values, their own beliefs, and not be brainwashed by Cocteau and his society. The only reason they come above ground is to get food."

Adds *Demolition Man* producer Joel Silver, "People are very happy in San Angeles. They're being run by an organization that has decided that everything should stay very status quo. The leader of the underground is beginning to ferment disorder. There are no guns, there is no force. There have been no deaths from anything but natural causes in 16 years."

The Wasteland underground has been constructed in a warehouse located at the Scholl Canyon Landfill in Eagle Rock, California, about 15 miles east of Warner Bros. It is lunchtime when I arrive, and scores of bizarrely-dressed Wasteland inhabitants in costumes designed by *Batman* alumnus Bob Ringwood—women

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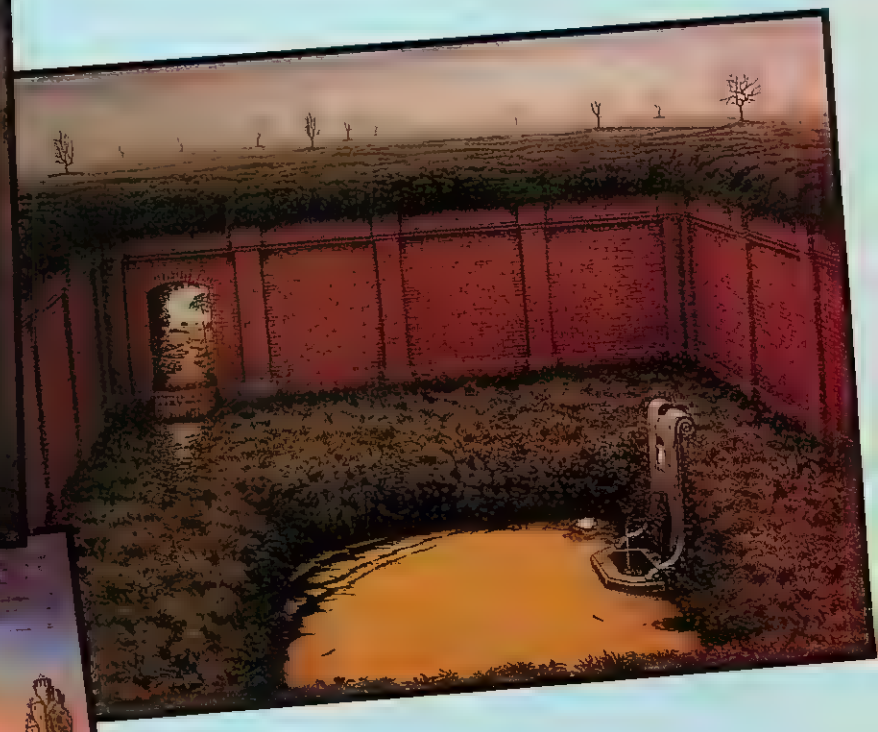

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with blackened faces and spiked hair, bodybuilders wearing uniforms adorned with pieces of rubber tires and chain linkage—march en masse to the honey wagon, like a scene out of a cyberpunk *How Green Was My Valley.*

On the set, a Radioactive Dreams-styled vision of junk and pop culture memorabilia, Stallone is finishing up a scene with supporting actor Benjamin Bratt, both men dressed in crisply tailored black LAPD police uniforms.

The action takes place in a skid row restaurant, where Spartan, a man fond of cigarettes and Whoppers, two items now outlawed by the current administration, is about to taste a local fast-food delicacy that would put McDonald's out of business faster than the time it takes to french a fry.

> It's the opposite of *Blade Runner,* really, which represented urban decay. Our film represents urban renewal.

"All I want is a beer…and a burger, if you have it," Stallone tells the confused-looking waitress as the camera rolls. On cue, he chews the burger appreciatively, unaware that he has been served…a ratburger. Some 50 crewpersons and set visitors squeeze together to observe the goings-on, Wesley Snipes among them. A few more lines of dialogue ("You know, it's not bad…" mutters Stallone, still chewing) and the take is complete, at which point the *Cliffhanger* star joins Silver and director Marco Brambilla at the video playback system to observe the results. Everyone seems pleased, particularly Stallone, who laughs upon seeing the contorted face he makes when "cut" is called—whatever is standing in for the ratburger is apparently not as tasty as he indicated on camera.

"There are all these ridiculous people around me and all I want to do is have a cigarette and a hamburger," Stallone jokes. "But meat is not allowed, cigarettes are not allowed, cursing is not allowed, action movies are not allowed—everything I am is not allowed."

Lunch is officially called and the cast and crew scatters. Over a meal of salad and fish, Brambilla discusses his take on *Demolition Man,* beginning with its place in the Joel Silver action-adventure cannon.

"We've taken a very old genre, that of the police officer trying to apprehend an escaped convict, and set in in a completely different world. The convict, played by Wesley Snipes, is actually a CryoCon, a man who has been to Cryogenic Prison and is supposed to have been rehabilitated to become a good citizen but in fact has become an even more dangerous threat to society. The only person in this new society who can track him down and catch him is someone who has the same kind of background and skills he does—Stallone in this case.

"Hopefully, the film will be more interesting than a lot of those generic action movies that we've been seeing lately. It gives me the opportunity to create a world that's very peculiar and gives the action sequences a different feel."

As for the film's similarity to one of the classics of science fiction, *Blade Runner,* Brambilla says, "The Wasteland environment you've seen to- day is the only similarity to *Blade Runner.* The real atmosphere in the film is above ground; above ground, the city is very Japanese in feeling. It's very clean, everything is user-friendly, very metallic and sterile. So it's the opposite of *Blade Runner,* really, which represented urban decay. Our film represents urban renewal. After the earthquake in Los Angeles, they've rebuilt the city and it's a much more ecological environment than *Blade Runner.*"

This is a future, Brambilla observes, where people have had to sacrifice personal freedoms in order to enjoy the advantages of a calm, collected, crime-free society.

"People have learned to live in a different way for the sake of having their safety protected. It's not really as harsh as [the world depicted in] Orwell's *1984,* but it has that kind of undertone to it. It's all hidden beneath a kind of user-friendly environment. Cocteau is the man who created this system of law enforcement, the CyroPrison. We come to find out that there's something wrong with this [seemingly placid] society, but it's hidden below the surface, a few layers deep."

It's also a very racially integrated future, according to the 32-year-old director, who came to Joel Silver's attention through his work in celebrated television commercials for such clients as Nike, Pepsi and General Motors. "You're not aware of any separation or segregation between different races. There's no racial conflict anymore, that's all been solved. That's also to deflect some of the criticism we may encounter with having Wesley Snipes play the bad guy. I've gone to great lengths to show that that's not a concern of this future society, that there is no racial bigotry left."

Snipes, his dyed blonde hair hidden beneath a fashionable bandana, a bit of stubble hugging his commanding chin, is clearly uncomfortable when the subject of racism is brought up in the context of his *Demolition Man* role. "The blonde hair will, right off the bat, disassociate me as being a black man. The audience will automatically say, 'Well, this ain't a brother. This is a mutant mother - - - - .' [laughs] At the same time, there's a strong desire [in the black community] to see black characters in a major film like this.

So it's a good opportunity for me. It's something you don't normally see. Usually, when you have a brother in a major box-office film, they get killed in the first five or 10 minutes. This time, it's at least an hour and 30, 40 minutes before I get snatched out."

Snipes appears to have little regard for the cerebral approach to film acting. "This cat doesn't exist," he protests when asked to expound on Phoenix's inner demons. "Hey, I just woke up one morning and—boom—I created him. He's not a real character. I didn't want to apply things that I apply to real characters to this role."

If there is a message to be found in *Demolition Man*—one strongly suspects that Silver, whose films use explosives the way David Copperfield utilizes piano wire, is slyly commenting on the folly of a gun-free society—Snipes hasn't a clue what it is. "Hey man, I don't think about it like that," he scoffs. "I'm just having a good time, and that's what I want people to do, go to the movie and have a good time. It's the kind of project that I would go see myself, because it's a fun movie. If people find messages in it, that's cool. But I don't see it as a message, I see it as entertainment."

For Silver, whose action-adventure films have grossed more than two billion dollars worldwide, *Demolition Man* is cops and robbers with a twist. "It's an anti-buddy action movie," he suggests. "Rather than it being two characters above the title, like Mel [Gibson] and Danny [Glover] in *Lethal Weapon* or Damon [Wayans] and Bruce [Willis] in *The Last Boy Scout*, here the two guys meet and don't become friends; they stay enemies through the end of the picture. Yes, it has a lot of the conventional stuff audiences want to see in the action genre, where you have car chases and explosions and gunshots and big fights, but at the same time, it's set in a very, very unique and different world.

*For* Demolition Man, *General Motors provided molds from the Ultra Light, one of their concept cars of the future, to help create a believable 2032 Los Angeles.*

"The set you're seeing here is the Underground, which is almost like one in *The Time Machine* where the Morlocks lived. Usually this is the future that is depicted in movies, where you see a very dark, dreary, unhappy place. Our future is very happy and very pleasant. Of course, there are problems. The society in *Demolition Man* is perhaps *too* politically correct. There is no cursing, there's no smoking, there's no drinking, there's no abortion—there isn't even any

*Continued on page 90*


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*By Andrews, Landis and Maples*

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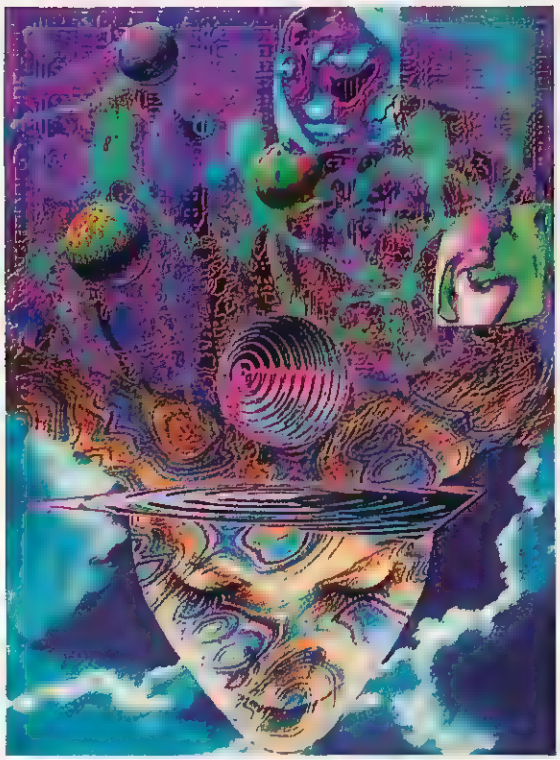

*When we trade in literal reality for virtual reality, the world might look very strange indeed. Computer illustration by Doug Chezem.*

VIRTUAL REALITY (VR) HAS ESCAPED THE REALM of scientists and science fiction writers to infect the imagination of the general public. The concept of donning goggles and gloves to interact with worlds that might exist only on a computer chip will certainly move from mere concept to polished technological reality in the coming years. But what will we have when we get there? What will be VR's benefits; what will be its drawbacks? To discuss this hot topic, we have brought together three scientists (two of whom also happen to be SF writers), each of whom has had reason to study the new technology of Virtual Reality.

Dr. Creve Maples was formerly Director of the Advanced Computer Architecture Lab at the University of California, and is currently Senior Scientist at Sandia National Laboratories, where he is Principal Investigator for the MUSE (Multidimensional, User-Oriented Synthetic Environment) Project, a VR-based system. Dr. Arlan Andrews is Manager of Advanced Manufacturing Initiatives at a national laboratory in the southwest, and is actively working to apply VR to the problems of product design, analysis, manufacturing and testing. Geoffrey Landis was Technical Chairman of the recent NASA symposium "Vision-21: Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in the Era of Cyberspace."

**SF AGE**: Some science concepts seem to leap out to capture the public imagination; ideas such as cold fusion, computer hacking, and going to the moon. Why has this happened with Virtual Reality?

**MAPLES**: I don't think VR is the same as cold fusion.

**SF AGE:** I don't mean that in a negative way, Creve, only that the concept has suddenly become "sexy" to the general public. Why is that? What is VR, and why has it gotten mass appeal?

**MAPLES**: VR has become very sexy — almost too much so. I think this is because it appeals to several basic human drives — adventure, exploration, curiosity and even the need to communicate. It appears to provide an entree into a new level of escapism, one without boundaries or side effects. It's *Star Trek's* holodeck, or *Deep Space Nine's* holosuite, only now. And like these, it can be used for education, recreation, examination, entertainment or stimulation. However, I don't really care for the term "Virtual Reality." It's an oxymoron. I prefer "anthroprocybersynchronicity." This translates as "the coming together of man and machine."

**SF AGE:** And what do you suppose are the chances of your term catching on, Creve?

**MAPLES**: Little, but it makes people think a bit more.

**SF AGE**: So what is Virtual Reality?

**LANDIS**: Virtual: being in essence or effect, but not in fact; not actual, but equivalent. Virtual Reality: not actual reality, but something that seems and feels real. It is an oxymoron, but a useful one. Myron Krueger's term was "artificial reality"; in some ways it is a linguistically-better term.

**SF AGE**: So why has Virtual Reality moved from the scientific community to capture the public imagination?

**ANDREWS**: I would venture several reasons it has caught on. First, the great name. Second, the concept, if not the technology, has a long history in SF. At least 40 years ago, in Clifford Simak's "City," humans all dropped out and went into dreaming machines — conceptually, again, like the VR we imagine is coming. According to the new *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, a story, "The Machine Stops" (1909), envisioned beings who received all their sensory info through networks. And *Brave New World* in the '30s had feelie movies.

**LANDIS:** There is a crucial difference between VR as envisioned by SF writers, and what is now being constructed by computer scientists, though.

**ANDREWS:** What the public really thinks, however, is that we finally have a technology by which dreams (planned ones) can come true.

**LANDIS:** Science fiction has long been fascinated with the possibility of being able to experience as real a world as that which has been created as a work of art. Several writers have proposed various brain-transducers or neural taps to allow someone to actually experience as reality a world that doesn't exist. What is new about Virtual Reality is the hardware implementation that doesn't require direct neural taps.

**MAPLES:** Whatever the term — artificial reality, cyberspace, synthetic environment, psychic space — VR is a bridge between people and the computer. While the

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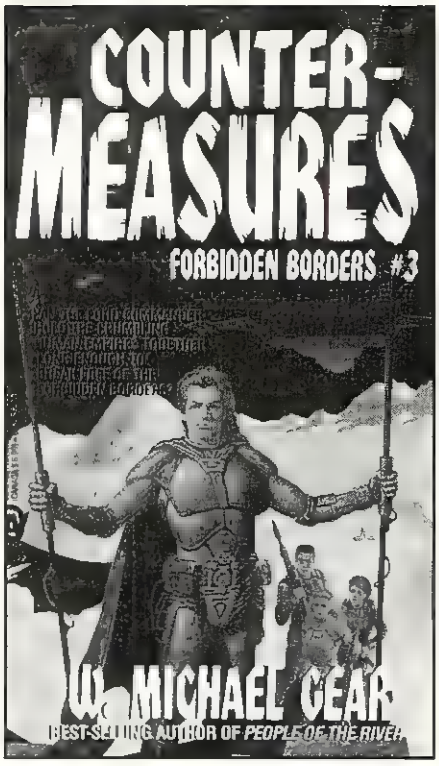


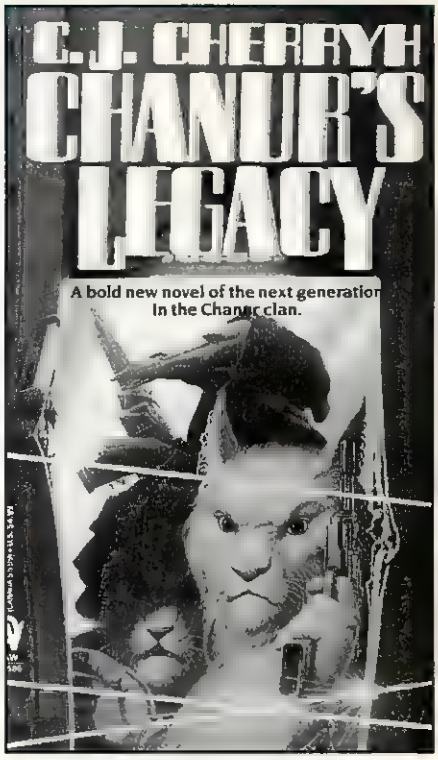


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exact nature of the bridge is the subject of considerable discussion and investigation (and is highly dependent on technology), the underlying objective is generally agreed upon. Computers of the future need to interact with humans in human terms. This means emphasis on visual displays, auditory cues, voice recognition, voice synthesis, tactile and force feedback, etc. All of which serve to create a more nat ural "virtual" environment.

[VR] appears to provide an entree into a new level of escapism, one without boundaries or side effects.

**ANDREWS:** But — just as with VCRs — the prurient interest will fuel the big bucks. Shepherd Mead's *Big Ball of Wax* had a VR machine with sexy women.

**SF AGE:** So where are we, and how did we get here?

**MAPLES:** What is necessary to create an "artificial reality," from a human perspective, is not well understood. The individual acceptance of reality is itself subjective. We don't really know what it means when people perceptually and experientially distinguish between environments they are looking at (e.g. TV and movies) and ones of which they feel they are a part (and may choose to interpret as real). What information must the computer simulation provide and what will the mind fill in? In a recent meeting we sponsored in Santa Fe (Future Directions of Human-Computer Interactions), a lot of discussion was focused on the nature of VR and whether it was simply a technological extension of graphics or something very different.

**SF AGE:** And what was the consensus?

**MAPLES:** The conclusions were two-fold. From a technological point of view, VR is the next generation beyond perspective graphics on a flat screen (albeit with the addition of sound and two-way human interaction). From the view of human perception, however, it's an entirely new ballgame.

**SF AGE:** So what was the first clumsy stab at VR?

**LANDIS:** In 1962, the prototype "Sensorama" system had the elements of perceptual presence, but not the interactivity we now associate with Virtual Reality. In the late '70s, the MIT "Aspen" project had the interactivity, but not the full sense of presence.

**MAPLES:** While the definition of VR is somewhat vague, probably the earliest actual VR system was developed by Ivan Sutherland around 1967.

**SF AGE:** And of what did that system consist?

**MAPLES:** It was a head-mounted display system that was suspended from the ceiling, and called the "Sword of Damocles." Although it was a binocular system, it was not stereoscopic — each eye saw the same image. Sutherland correctly concluded that depth cues (the perceptual change that occurs to an image when the head is moved) were more important to creating the illusion of 3-D than stereo vision. For this reason, priority was given to tracking the observer's head position and altering the visual image accordingly (move your head to the left and the computer image is moved to the right). Stereoscopic display was added as his system evolved during the next several years. However, even at its best, the system was only capable of displaying simple 3-D images, such as a wire frame cube, to the observer in real-time.

**SF AGE:** And how far have we come from that? What barriers have had to be overcome?

**MAPLES:** Although we've progressed a great deal in the last 25 years, and can interactively display enormously more complex and realistic images, our problems are essentially the same as Sutherland's. Graphically, we need to be able to realistically, at least from a human perspective, represent scenes. This means not only accurately modeling objects, but handling lighting effects such as shadows, reflectiveness, translucence, texture shading, and even atmospheric effects such as haze, fog, distance diffuseness, etc. Handling real-time human interaction presents its own set of problems — accurately tracking the position of the head (the direction you're looking), the body (where you're located), your arm, hand and fingers (for pointing or interacting with objects), etc. Technologically, you need color display systems for each eye, which are small, lightweight (glasses size), and capable of high resolution — a minimum of about 1200 x 1200 points. You also need specialized optical lenses which will "wrap" these images around the head to simulate peripheral vision. Finally, you need sufficient computing power to integrate all these elements. Unfortunately, technology *today is still* not able to provide all the capability we need. So, like Sutherland, we have to use simpler environments than we would like.

**ANDREWS:** In the early '70s, I read a Bell Labs memo entitled "Teleportation." (I couldn't pass it up.) It involved the next step beyond video conferencing — a helmet with two earphones and two TV monitors that was connected to an automaton device in a meeting room where, it was assumed, other executives would be meeting. The surprising, transcendental effect on the persons who first wore the device was, "Gee—I felt like I was there—not here." And so they called it "teleportation," a totally unexpected event. Never did a darn thing with it, unfortunately.

**MAPLES:** It's amazing how many "old"

ideas show up in new technology. We are utilizing "teleportation" as one means of getting around virtual environments.

**ANDREWS:** In 1978, Bob Lucky of Bell Labs gave a talk in Indianapolis about a Virtual Reality game network for interactive playing. It was written up in the *IEEE Spectrum* in 1979 or 1980.

**MAPLES:** Not to mention there are several "views" of VR. I think part of the excitement over VR is that it taps into modes of human perception we know are there but don't fully understand.

**LANDIS:** As does good art.

**MAPLES:** What the feeling of "being there" or "immersion" physically means is difficult to quantify. It appears that in such environments our senses process and interpret information in a very different manner than when we are simply looking at — but are not part of — a scene.

**SF AGE:** So what is the state of the art? Where do we stand?

**MAPLES:** To some extent that depends on what flavor of VR you mean. There are VR rooms like Kruger's Videoplace where you are tracked by video cameras and computers analyze the image (shadows, actually); determine what you are doing; and project both real and synthetic images onto the walls of the room. The user can then interact with the synthetic images (or vice versa). The CAVE, developed by DeFanti, also projects images on the walls, ceiling and floor of a room — thus eliminating the need for a video headset, but attaches trackers to the user to determine location and head position. At the University of North Carolina, Fuchs has developed a system with a robotic arm which not only allows you to see and manipulate molecules, but to "feel" the intermolecular forces as the two molecules are moved together to "dock." To understand where we are, consider the operation of a relatively "normal" head-mounted VR system. To create a virtual environment, you need to determine where the person is in your synthetic space and where they are looking. The model of the environment must then be drawn in perspective from this point of view, and then lighted, shaded, and have all the hidden lines removed. This is for one eye. The process is then repeated from the point of view of the other eye. To provide realism, the computer must then shift and calculate this scene, for each eye, in conjunction with the person's motion, about 30 times per second. Small, high-resolution color TV screens are required to show sufficient detail, and sophisticated optics are necessary to provide the wide field-of-view humans normally experience. And to this let's add sound, in the form of dynamic audio cues and synthetic speech generation. Now throw in some tactile and force feedback to allow you to touch and feel objects; hand and body sensors so that you can become part of the environment (and be "seen" by others sharing this environment — wherever


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they are); top it off with kinesthetic force synthesis (e.g., G-force, vibrations, etc.) temperature control and voice recognition, and you have quite a demanding system. Surprisingly, however, most of this capability is currently achievable, at least embryonically, if you don't make the model too complicated.

**LANDIS:** There are several different levels of Virtual Reality. One level — being researched very seriously by the military — is the "cockpit" VR, where you are in a simulated cockpit of a vehicle. This is an outgrowth of the flight simulators developed in World War II, and a bit simpler than the complete VR that Creve discusses.

**MAPLES:** Cockpit simulators were and are a precursor to today's VR systems. They were the first practical applications of immersive interactive systems and served to prove an important concept — that such immersion could successfully be used to train people for real world work.

> To create a virtual environment, you need to determine where the person is in your synthetic space and where they are looking.

**ANDREWS:** I saw a beautiful, though primitive, VR setup at the Institute for Defense Analyses in Alexandria, Virginia this year. We rode in the nose of a Tomahawk missile through Kuwait City. Primitive in that it was just large video screens without helmets.

**LANDIS:** Did it have 3-D? Interactivity?

**ANDREWS:** Not 3-D, but interactive with the "pilot" flying it. Can't really use 3-D beyond a few dozen meters, anyhow.

**MAPLES:** As Sutherland pointed out, stereo isn't the most important aspect of VR.

**LANDIS:** It is one component of the sense of presence — but only one.

**MAPLES:** Depth perception is a much more complex effect.

**LANDIS:** True. A good portion of how we perceive depth comes from the effect known as "motion parallax".

**MAPLES:** Lighting and shadows also provide the mind with important information. Peripheral vision plays a crucial role in the sense of "being there" that isn't clearly understood. Studies now show that there are seven distinct regions of the eye's retina which are mapped to different regions of the brain. The functions of these regions aren't known.

**ANDREWS:** Jaron Lanier, a pioneer (from New Mexico) in VR, worked with the gloves a while back. He didn't like them all that well and thought that we would have to use other means to navigate the virtual world. Creve, would you list your definitions of the kinds of VR?

**MAPLES:** There is such confusion over what VR means that we developed a taxonomy to facilitate communication with fellow researchers. We divide VR into three functionally differentiated classes — simulated reality, abstract reality and telepresence — with subclasses under each. Simulated reality involves modeling and interacting with real world systems, ranging from molecules, to buildings, to the universe. This is probably the best known application area of VR. Abstract reality involves the development of environments based on information—experimental data, census information, economic data. While such systems are important to study and understand, they have no real physical representation. Telepresence reality involves mixing live video and artificially-created models or interactions. This would include, for example, microsurgery, robotic operation, or a doctor operating on a patient thousands of miles away.

**LANDIS:** Telepresence is an area we have a great interest in here at NASA. Exploring the cloud tops of Jupiter. Visiting the micro-world of bacteria, or of ants.

**MAPLES:** Simply viewing remote video signals may be telepresence, but it isn't telepresence reality. Immersive interaction with the information and overlaying computer-generated, non-visual information (e.g. radiation fields, temperature variations, pipes inside walls) create a telepresent reality.

**LANDIS:** Telepresence may allow us to explore Mars from orbit without contaminating the surface with human effluents that could wipe out any possible "native" Mars life.

**ANDREWS:** We'd need much better video and band widths than the *Viking* Mars probes. Too boring to sit and watch a vertical line painted every few seconds.

**MAPLES:** While telepresence is important, it can only take you where something goes. VR can take you where man may never go.

**LANDIS:** Or to places that exist only in imagination.

**MAPLES:** If, for example, you want to better understand the forces involved in molecular bonding, you could "become" an electron, see the world from its perspective, and experience its probabilistic orbit around atomic sites; or travel at light speed and experience Lorentz-Fitzgerald distortions; or enter a black hole and watch it collapse; or become a *T-rex*, with different eye positions and center of mass; or explore the Mayan ruins at Tikal as they existed 800 years ago. Developing such environments, of course, depends on how well we understand the specifics of the model. One could think of it

*Continued on page 98*

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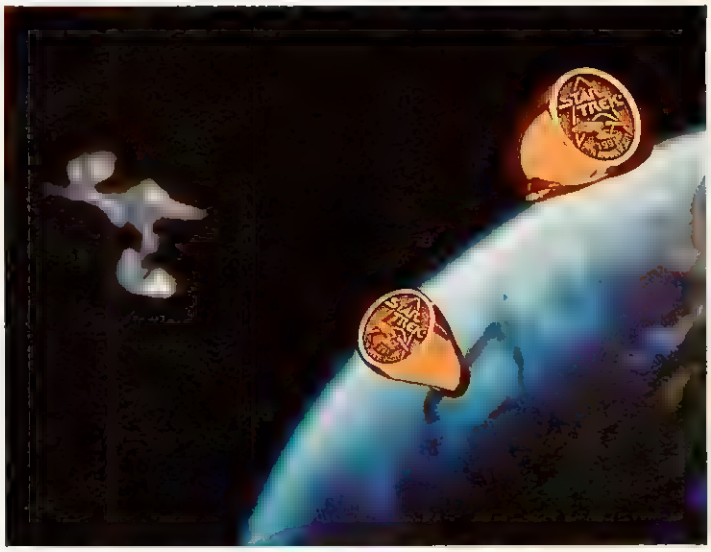

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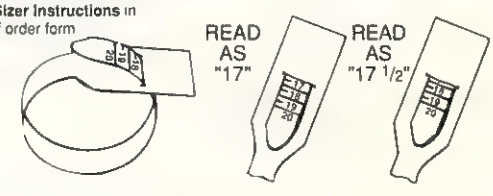


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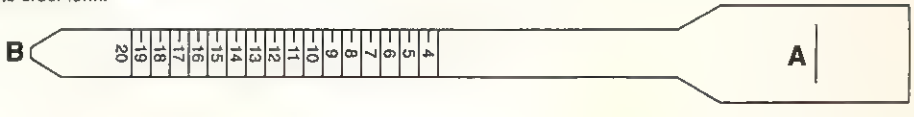

## ESSAY

*By Norman Spinrad*

# If you love Science Fiction, then it's time to fight back against Anti-SF.

*The war between SF and fantasy continues, and it's time to choose up sides. Illustration by Alan Craddock.*

NO ONE REALLY MADE MUCH OF A PUBLIC FUSS when the Science Fiction Writers of America, an outfit known to contend bitterly over such essentials as membership rules and how many characters in a word, recently changed its name to the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America.

It seemed reasonable, even inevitable. After all, more fantasy than science fiction is published under the SF logo these days, the membership of the SFWA had long since come to include more writers of fantasy than of science fiction, and some bright boy even figured out that by making it the "Science fiction and Fantasy Writers of America" that SFWA could keep its old acronym and logo.

True, a few of the hard-core hard-science boys were heard to mutter in their beer that the effete fantasists had put the capper on their dastardly plot to steal the organization away from the guys who wrote the right stuff, but these were generally undead white males who had been grousing for years that fantasy was a degeneration of the form, "playing tennis with the net down," lacking in intellectual rigor.

But this is just plain silly, seeing as how about half the generally acknowledged masterworks of world literature, from Homer through Shakespeare and on into Kafka, Joyce, and the Latin American Magic Realists are fantasies by any coherent definition of the term. It would be entirely asinine to contend that two or three millennia of great fantasists are the literary inferiors of Heinlein, Clarke and Asimov because their fiction lacks extrapolative rigor and cavalierly violates the known laws of physics.

Of course it does. But this is not a literary or intellectual failure. This is literary and intellectual choice. Fantasy is not failed science fiction. Science fiction is not a more rigorous form of fantasy. About the only thing the two really have in common is the SF logo.

But *that*, the SF logo, *is* what contemporary fantasy writers have stolen from science fiction writers. And that, I believe, is the real beef the hard-science boys have, whether they know it or not. And there, I think, they have a point.

For I have come to believe that the publication of fantasy and science fiction in the same lines of books edited by the same editors under the umbrella logo of SF does a grave disservice to science fiction as a literature, to its writers, and to its readers.

Not that there was ever any dastardly plot afoot.

The whole thing was an unfortunate accident of publishing history.

Prior to the enormous success of the Ace and Ballantine reprints of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, adult fantasy was pretty much a nonexistent publishing category, and certainly not available in paperback. Ace, who published the first mass market edition of *Lord of the Rings*, was almost entirely a science fiction publisher. Ballantine, who published the authorized edition, though a general paperback publisher, had a dominant science fiction line. Both houses knew they had a hot *something*, but *what?*

Ace had little choice but to publish *Lord of the Rings* more or less as "science fiction" or SF, since that was the marketing niche the house occupied. The trilogy sold very well as SF for Ace, perhaps because this was a shrewd calculation of the marketing demographics, or perhaps just because *Lord of the Rings* would have sold well no matter *how* it was packaged or marketed.

When Ballantine brought out the authorized edition a while later, they did likewise, and it sold even better. Betty and Ian Ballantine, probably the shrewdest team in paperback publishing history, sensed that maybe there was a commercial appeal here broader than Tolkien.

So they decided to test the waters. They commissioned Lin Carter to put together something called the "Ballantine Fantasy Rediscovery Series," reprints of classic fantasy novels.

When these golden oldies proved commercially viable in paperback, the next logical step was to commission new fantasy novels, and, since working fantasy novelists were few at the time, the logical place to go was to their stable of science fiction writers, who would seem to be the next best thing.

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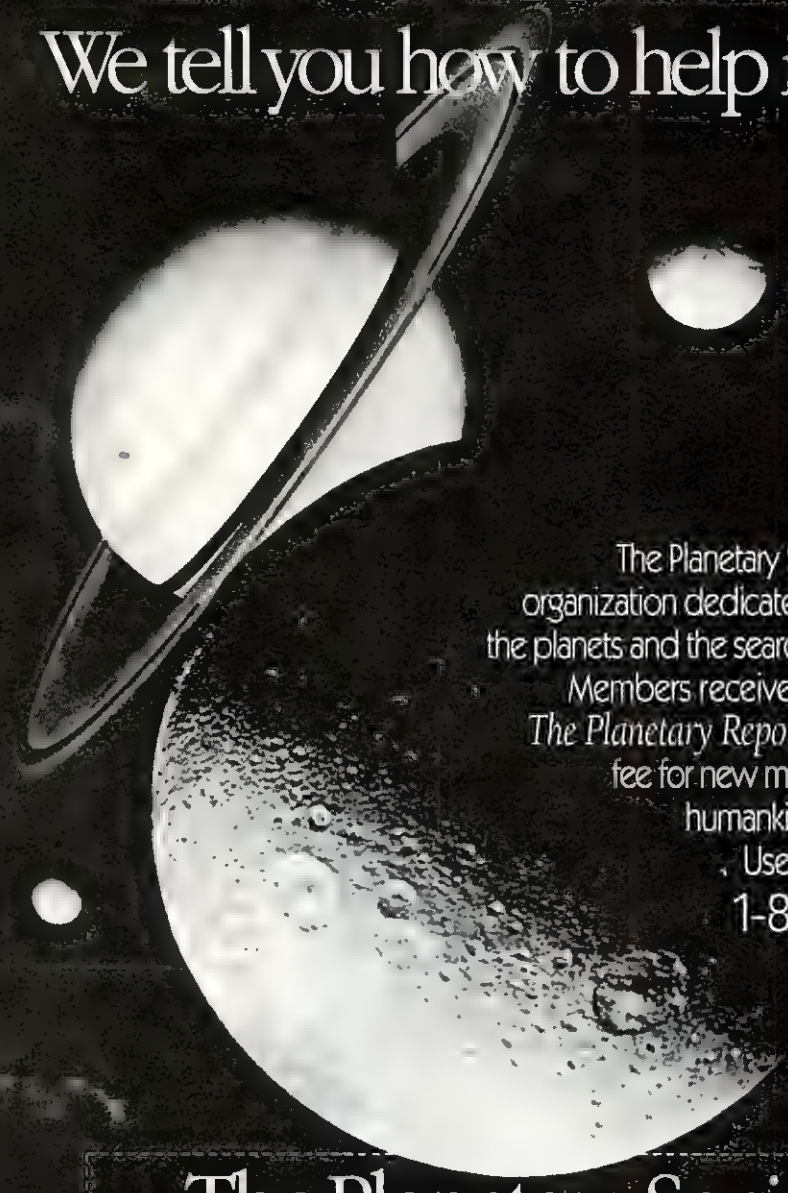

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And since science fiction writers were now writing these new contemporary fantasies, and since they had pre-established followings among the fans who went to science fiction conventions, bought science fiction magazines, and published their own amateur fanzines, hey, why not market *fantasy* to this easily targetable SF audience too?

The rest is publishing history. SF, which was born as a straightforward monogram for Science Fiction, has now become a complex and ambiguous marketing icon under which half a dozen or so publishing houses bring out lines of books encompassing everything from medieval fantasy to barbarian sword and sorcery to contemporary urban horror to *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* novelizations and, yes, a certain amount of actual science fiction too.

Prior to this transmogrification of the genre, science fiction had been niche publishing, less than a hundred titles a year, primarily bought by a specialized audience of cognoscenti.

SF, on the other hand, has long since become big publishing business. There are over 500 new titles a year and almost as many reprints, three or four books riding the best-seller lists at most given times, 15 percent to 20 percent of all the fiction published in the United States, depending upon how you figure it and what you include.

Thus the altered genre that emerged toward the end of the 1980s out of what in the 1970s was known as the great Science Fiction Boom. Only now, in the 1990s, is it becoming apparent that this was a misnomer, that it was really the great *SF* Boom, primarily the result of SF's absorption of the new category of commercial fantasy from the very moment of its birth and the booming success thereof.

If you subtract the fantasy from SF what do you find?

Well, you do find that more good science fiction is being published than ever before, maybe 30 or 40 new novels a year of serious literary intent and varying degrees of merit and about an equal number of decent commercial efforts aimed at a more or less intelligent adult audience.

That's the good news. There are more good writers writing good science fiction out there than at any time in the history of the species. This is science fiction's true literary Golden Age.

The bad news is that this literary renaissance is being buried in a vast pile of schlock.

Fantasy titles aside, seriously intended science fiction, or even science fiction written as intelligent entertainment for adults, is surrounded and suffocated by at least three times as much assorted *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* novelizations, brand-name franchise universe series, novelizations of Saturday morning cartoons, role-playing games, even *lines of toys.*

All of which unequivocally employ the settings, imagery, tropes, and schtick of science fiction, not fantasy...and yet....

And yet I have come to believe that were it not for the fantasy-fueled SF Boom, most of this stuff would not exist, would not be elbowing new science fiction of real merit and the classics of a century of literary history off the bookstore racks and out of the public consciousness.

Superficially, this stuff may be science fiction, or more properly "sci-fi," as it is so often called anyway by the marketeers responsible for its existence, but spiritually, esthetically, literarily, it is only a kind of golem, a dead carapace of science fiction imagery feebly animated by the worst aspect of commercial fantasy's psychological appeal.

The psychological appeal of *true* science fiction, it has often been said, is the so-called "sense of wonder"—the pleasurable shock of the new, the readers' sense, real or illusory, that this stuff is causing their own consciousness to mutate as it surfs along the cutting edge of onward evolution.

And this effect is to be obtained *within* the constraints of the physical laws of the universe, so that the readers can be induced to believe that these wonders exist *in the very same universe* that they occupy, that given luck and time, such transformational events just might really happen to them.

Thus the core appeal of science fiction is that it offers the thrill of transformation, evolution, revolution, change, the overthrow of the given by the new, within the realm of the scientific and psychological possible.

Fantasy, on the other hand, *cannot* deal with the possible. If it did, it wouldn't be fantasy. This, of course, leaves open the literally infinite realm of imagination, which is why fantasy is arguably the urliterature of the species, why it is the venue of so many literary masterpieces, why the contention that it is somehow intellectually or literarily inferior to science fiction is idiotic.

However, what is actually written as fantasy today and published under the SF icon is another matter.

**It would be entirely asinine to contend that two or three millennia of great fantasists are the literary inferiors of Heinlein, Clarke and Asimov...**

I'm not talking about the occasional masterpieces that wriggle through the genre machinery, but the great wad of product that dominates the SF racks and makes SF a major "profit center" of contemporary American publishing. The stuff that sells. The stuff that publishers therefore want to publish. The stuff that the market therefore calls into being. Clones of clones of clones of clones of Tolkien.

Wizards. Sword-wielding male ingenues in shining fetishwork armor. Dragons. Damsels in distress. Demonic spirits. Unicorns. Medieval level technology. Feudal social organization. The divine right of the True King or Queen. Ultimate battles between Good and Evil.

Sometimes, out of morbid curiosity, I dip into some of this stuff, and until recently I've always been amazed at the commercial success of writers like Terry Brooks and Tad Williams, to pick two typical fantasy writers who have inhabited the national best-seller lists.

Why does this stuff sell? It's not particularly well-written, it doesn't say anything new, the settings and tropes are nothing out of the ordinary, you know more or less what's going to happen and who's going to win, it's all so, well, *generic*, that it seems as if it could be published with nothing but a big bar code for a cover.

And then the satori finally hit me.

Brooks and Williams and Company don't sell well *in spite* of the derivative generic nature of their work.


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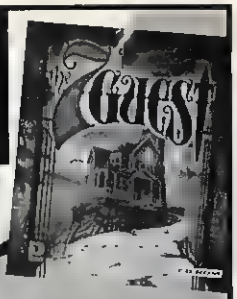


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They sell well *because* of it.

Generic fantasy sells *because* it's generic.

Unlike science fiction, it offers adventures set in realms that, while superficially exotic, are psychologically quite familiar from book to book, writer to writer. The usual sorts of identification figures. The usual feudal politics. The usual simplistic moral struggle between Good and Evil in which right almost always makes might.

Despite the illusion that what is being purveyed is mystical transcendence and moral apotheosis, this sort of fantasy is profoundly conservative, reactionary even—a literature of psychological, social and political reassurance.

And, unlike science fiction, it does *not* take place within the realm of the scientific or psychological possible. All but the most schizoid of readers can enjoy it in a state of free-floating detachment. Fantasy in more senses than one.

And thus a kind of anti-science fiction.

The numbers clearly show that more people want to read this sort of literature of reassurance than want to read fiction designed to contradict familiar assumptions, shatter established paradigms, overturn their worldviews, and convince them that all this is occurring in the realm of the possible in the bargain.

Perhaps this has always been so, or perhaps it is a symptom of the times through which we are passing.

Either way, the undeniable commercial success of generic fantasy, combined with the accident of publishing history that finds science fiction competing with it for readers under the SF logo has produced a vast rack-filling glut of pseudo-science fiction—fantasy in science fiction drag, purveying the same sort of generic familiarity, the same reactionary politics, the same simplistic moral dualism, the same sense of dreamy reassurance.

On this level, it really doesn't matter whether it's mystical swords or lasers, Sauron or Darth Vader, space battles or castle sieges, dragons or bug-eyed monsters, golems or robots, Merlin or Doctor Zarkov.

Or does it?

For there is *one* difference between straightforward generic fantasy and this sort of pseudo-science fiction. Fantasy does not pretend to be taking place in the realm of the possible. This stuff, however dim, does. Its effect on minds not too clear on the difference may be unsettling.

Remember Mathias Rust, the plucky young German lad who evaded a thousand miles of Soviet air defenses to land his light plane smack in the middle of Red Square? Who a year or two later stabbed a young lady for spurning his heroic advances?

Did the Devil make him do it?

Far from it! *Au contraire!*

According to the hero of the tale himself, he was only emulating his science fictional alter-ego and role model, Perry Rhodan. □

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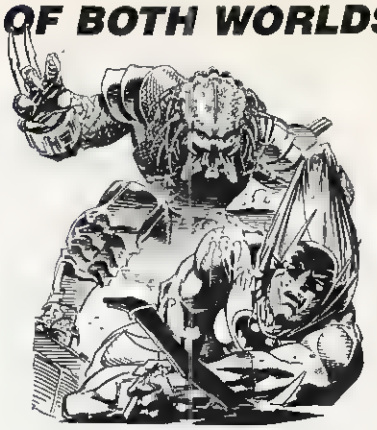

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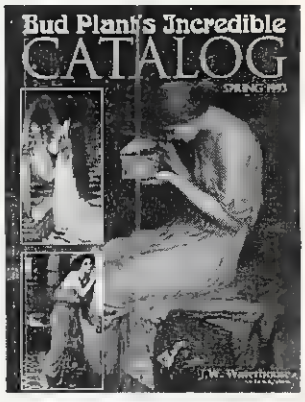


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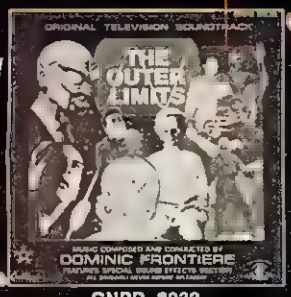


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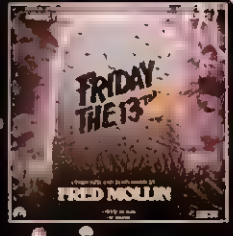


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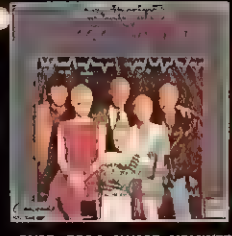

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# Mind Power Breakthrough!

## Plug Your Brain Into This Powerful Mind Machine To Zap Stress, Improve Mental Powers, And Free Yourself Of Self-Sabotaging Behavior. Plus Get $500 Worth Of Bonus *MindWare*™ !

*By Dane Spotts*

After a stressful day at work I put on my space age shades, plug in the "Dreamtime" tape, and program my *SuperMind*™ computer for a "heavy-duty" Theta session. As I punch the start button I'm reminded of NASA's virtual reality machines. Those billion dollar video games that transport your consciousness into an artificial computer world you manipulate with voice commands and gestures.

Of course, the *SuperMind*™ isn't virtual reality. No. It's more like electronic Zen.

### A Vacation In 20 Minutes

After only a few moments of being plugged into this machine, I was sucked into a deep trance. Weird colors and patterns were created on the insides of my closed eyelids. I felt super relaxed and experienced the most profound sensation of peace and joy. It felt as if my soul was transported into the garden of eden. Was this the blissful ecstasy of enlightenment mystics write about? I felt an orgasmic endorphin rush stream into my brain. Yes! I was launching into Theta-land. Big time.

Using pulses of sequenced light emitted from the glasses and computer generated sound frequencies, the *SuperMind*™ synchronizes your brainwave patterns, driving your brain into an altered state of consciousness similar to dreaming.

Based on hard scientific evidence which associates states of consciousness with dominant brainwave activity, this machine coaxes your brain into an Alpha/Theta pattern (brainwaves in the 4-10Hz range), which is associated with deep meditation and mental imagery. Zen monks and yogis train for decades to achieve this same level of mental control.

Developed by the Mind Research Laboratory, now anyone can enter profound mental states at the push of a button. And because it's computer controlled you can experiment with thousands of different frequency combinations. Or you can choose from 10 "preset programs" designed to produce specific states of consciousness – ranging from dream-like sleep and meditation to extreme alertness – all at the push of a button.

The size of a pocket calculator, it's so portable I take it with me on business trips to beat stress and jet lag. A 20-minute session gives me the equivalent of 8-hours sleep and helps reset my biological clock.

### Boost Brainpower

Listen: Training your brain to generate Theta activity for even a few minutes each day has enormous benefits, including boosting the immune system, enhancing creativity, I.Q., and psychic abilities, along with increasing feelings of psychological well-being.

For a little black box to do all that to your brain in 20 minutes is amazing enough, but it's only part of the story. Because this machine can also be used to accelerate learning and modify negative self-defeating behavior.

The *SuperMind*™ computer uses a programmable light/sound matrix to synchronize your brainwaves into desired mind-states. You can custom program thousands of different frequency combinations or use the built-in preset programs with amazing 3-D sound effects.

### Automatic Hypnosis

Let's say you wanted to quit smoking, enhance your self-esteem, lose weight, or just play a better game of golf. You could pay a hypnotist $100 an hour or more to reprogram these new self-image and behavior patterns into your subconscious. Or, by plugging into the *SuperMind*™ you could induce a hypnotic trance in a matter of seconds. Then, while your subconscious is primed for psychological programming, you play prerecorded behavioral mindscripts, and these new success patterns become transferred onto your brain.

I'll include a special report that teaches you exactly how to create your own behavioral mindscripts on everything from success conditioning and weight control to enhancing sexual performance. Or if you wish, use Zygon's prerecorded library of MindWare™ tapes. Whichever method you choose, you'll possess an extremely flexible and powerful tool for rescripting your subconscious and improving your life.

### Instant Speed Learning

Plus, you can use this machine for speed learning. Tests at the University of California have revealed the effects of Theta frequencies on learning. During their study a group of 20 students learned 1,800 words of Bulgarian in 120 hours while using Theta stimulation programs. In about 1/3 the normal time they spoke and wrote the new language.

As an additional bonus I'll be sending you a special report on how to set up your own speed learning system to learn foreign languages and new material at lightning fast speed.

### Free Mood-Lifting Library

And if you order your *SuperMind*™ now *(during this special introductory period)*, you'll receive a third special bonus – FREE. Four very unique MindWare™ soundtracks, called Moodscapes™, enhance your *SuperMind*™ experience. You simply connect a stereo player to the *SuperMind*™ unit using the patch cord provided. While the frequency matrix of your *SuperMind*™ alters your mind-state, the Moodscapes™ soundtrack transports your consciousness into a beautiful and unique aural landscape. Because your brain is so "tuned in" by the light/sound frequencies, your mind creates an intense array of mental images. The combination is truly exhilarating.

And that's only the beginning. Because as part of this special promotion, I'm including $500 worth of additional MindWare™ bonuses with your *SuperMind*™ computer. For a

limited time the *SuperMind*™ comes with...

## Super Motivation Library

Turn stress into success, and a loser mind-set into a winning one at the touch of a button with the 22-title Behavioral Mindscripts Library™. By first synchronizing your brainwaves into the optimum mind-state for psychological programming, the *SuperMind*™ uses these mindscripting tapes to rewire deeply embedded subconscious belief patterns. Reprogram self-sabotaging behavior and implant new success patterns automatically. Normally each title is $10, but for a limited time I'm bundling this entire $220 library with your *SuperMind*™ computer.

And there's more...

## Speak French, Spanish, German, & Italian Overnight

Using the amazing accelerated language learning system, these four Instant Language courses are also bundled with your *SuperMind*™ computer. Each course works with software built into your *SuperMind*™ to imprint a super-fast working knowledge of these languages into your memory. Edited to accelerate learning time, words and phrases for speaking in each country are imprinted directly onto your brain cells. No verbs to conjugate or grammar to learn. A $200 super-value, all four language courses won't cost you a penny.

And here's something else...

## 3 Fantastic Mind Journeys

Trigger vivid sensory responses in your brain and transport your consciousness on a journey to other times and places with three mind-blowing experiences. "Aboriginal Dreamtime" takes you to a mystical time when the world was new and magic ruled. "Cetacean Mind Link" puts your consciousness inside a whale and dolphin to experience an incredible ocean world. And finally the ultimate mind-trip, "Near Death Experience" simulates the 5 astral stages of a journey out of your body, then back again, renewed and enlivened. Three superbly crafted *SuperMind*™ experiences are $25 each, adding another $75 bonus value to your package.

# "Instant French" Free!

**Learn 4 foreign languages, rescript self-sabotaging behavior, and send your brain on incredible mind journeys! ALL FREE!**
Details below...

The *SuperMind*™ bonus bundle package above includes the Behavioral Mindscripts Library™, 3 Fantastic Mind Journeys, and the 4 Instant Language courses with workbook, as well as your free Moodscapes™ Library, and Auto-Hypnosis and Speed Learning Audio Reports.

## $17,000 Machine For $299

I'm super pumped up by this powerful self-improvement tool. Of all the light/sound machines I've used, the only one that even comes close to the *SuperMind*™ is a $17,000 clinical model.

This powerful brain boosting computer with all its incredible bonuses – "Auto-Hypnosis" Special Report ($25 value), the "Speed Learning System" ($25 value), Moodscapes™ Library ($100 value), and the incredible MindWare™ Bonus Bundle Package ($500 value), is all yours for only $299.95.

## 30-Day Free Trial

And you can try it entirely at my risk over the next 30 days. Take your brain on a mind machine journey into incredible mind-altering experiences, learn foreign languages at the push of a button, and reprogram a loser mind-set into a winning one. If for any reason you're not blown away by the technology, send your computer back to me for a full refund. But no matter what, keep the $100 worth of Moodscapes™ as my free gift just for giving it a shot.

To order, simply call my toll free number and ask for the *SuperMind*™ special offer (Item #405). Or send your check or money order for $299.95 plus $15 shipping & handling to the address below. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

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*A $220 value, the Behavioral Mindscripts Library™ is yours FREE with your SuperMind™ Bonus Bundle Package.*

### 3 FANTASTIC MIND JOURNEYS FREE!

Using a special combination of sound effects and digital harmonics, these soundtracks launch your brain into "virtual reality"-like experiences similar to what we saw Arnold Schwarzenegger experience in the movie *Total Recall*.

Aboriginal Dreamtime – launches your consciousness into the remote outback of Australia where you experience a mystical time when the world was new and magic ruled.

Cetacean Mind Link – turns your consciousness into a whale swimming the ocean with a remarkable ease. Your mind links with perhaps the most intelligent species on the planet.

Near Death Experience – you experience the ultimate mind-trip, as your consciousness passes through 5 different levels of awareness on your journey toward the light of peace and love. This simulation then brings your consciousness back into your body, energized and enlivened.

*A $75 value, these 3 Fantastic Mind Journeys are yours FREE with your SuperMind™ Bonus Bundle Package.*

### 4 INSTANT LANGUAGES FREE!

Speak four languages overnight. Instant French, Instant Spanish, Instant German, & Instant Italian use the *SuperMind*™ computer to stimulate the optimum brain-state for maximum learning. Then the language soundtrack imprints new words and phrases directly onto your brain cells. A second tape included with each course uses a special reinforcement system to lock the language session into permanent memory. There are no verbs to conjugate or grammar to learn. This unique combination of conscious and unconscious learning is a super-easy and fun way to learn. A limited once-in-a-lifetime offer, these courses normally retail for $49.95 each, but are yours free as part of this special offer. Each course includes 2 audio cassettes, and you get all four Instant Language courses with your *SuperMind*™ system.

*A $200 value, the Instant Language™ Library is yours FREE with your SuperMind™ Bonus Bundle Package.*

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Millions of years from now, long after mutated bugs have replaced mankind, Earth will still have a need for sugar, cholesterol, preservatives, and...

# EARL'S SNACK UTOPIA

BY ROBERT A. METZGER

*Illustration by Nick Smith*

I'M LOCKED UP IN THE LOONY BIN FOR THE REST OF MY life. Hell, I deserve it. But not for the reason you might think. My real crime is that I destroyed the world.

But no one seems to have noticed.

They want me to write this down. They call it therapy. I call it bull. But I'm doing it because I hope that some of you who read this will understand why I blew up those four Big Marty's Snack Shacks outside of Mobile, Alabama, killing 23 people.

Twenty-three people. Get serious. They weren't people.

What I'm about to tell you isn't a story. This is real life, not something seen on TV. I had no intention of destroying the world. I was just trying to save my own butt, but then things got totally out of hand. And now I'm locked up, and it's up to the rest of you to take up the fight. You've got to.

Our entire world is at stake.

It all started on a Tuesday, about 2 o'clock in the morning. I was manning the register at Earl's Snack Utopia, just off of I-15 in North Las Vegas. The store was pretty empty. There was an old Indian at the mag rack, staring glassy-eyed at this month's *Big Butted Babes* centerfold, a couple of rednecks loading up on chewing tobacco and squabbling over which of our fine beef-like jerky products they should buy, and a half-asleep guy still wearing pajama tops, hacking up his lungs, rummaging through our wondrous selection of several-year-old cough syrup. It was a pretty typical Tuesday night.

Then the Spook walked in.

He'd been a Tuesday night fixture for almost a year. His arrival meant that it was 2:12 a.m. There was no reason to check the clock. Same time, same station. Always wearing cowboy boots and a trenchcoat, he sort of floated up to the counter and stopped. His face was pasty-white, looking as if he never actually got out in the light of day.

"Morning, your Spooksterness," I said, while giving him a flip of my Earl's Snack Utopia cap.

The Spook seemed to focus his glassy eyes about 4 feet to the far side of my head. "The rules must be observed," he said.

"You got it, Spook," I said, as I once again flipped my cap to him. That was all that was required. I had absolutely no idea what these rules were, but that never seemed to matter to the Spook. He then turned and walked away. I knew exactly where he was going, the same place that he went every Tuesday night. The Spook was partial to anything with the Hostess label. I'd watch him shuffle down aisle seven, apparently waiting for something to touch his fancy, and then he'd drop to his knees. He'd usually go for the Ding Dongs or Ho Ho's, sometimes to the powdered sugar Donette Gems, and on rare occasion to the Sno Balls or Suzy Q's. But most times it was just the Ding Dongs. He'd pick up a box, hold it about a foot in front of his eyes and then mumble to it. And that was about that. He'd eventually return the box to the shelf, get up, and then shuffle out past the cash register. I'd watched him damn closely the first few Tuesdays, but after a while I just learned to ignore him.

If I could have seen the future, I would have taken a baseball bat to him that night, crunched his skull, and happily spent the rest of my life in the state pen. That way I wouldn't have destroyed the world.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

That Tuesday night I ignored the Spook as I always did and went back to flipping the pages of the *Global Enquirer,* only stopping to read when I came across a story about a half man, half fish that had washed up on a beach in Malibu, demanding that the United Nations outlaw tartar sauce. As I continued to read, an opened box of Ding Dongs was pushed across my *Enquirer.* I blinked, my eyeballs felt like they were bulging out of their sockets, and I tingled from head to toe.

I slowly looked up.

The Spook stood in front of me. His cheeks were puffed out like a chipmunk's, obviously full of Ding Dongs. His jaw worked up and down, and devil's food cake and creme filling dribbled from out of his mouth, most of it sticking to his chin.

"The time has arrived," he mumbled.

That sounded bad, incredibly bad. I was certain those were the very words uttered by every automatic-rifle-wielding maniac just before he unloads a full clip into whoever has the bad luck to be nearby.

The Spook took a step back from the counter, reached into his trenchcoat with his Ding Dong encrusted left hand, and pulled out the biggest, nastiest-looking pistol I'd ever seen. He aimed it at my forehead and then tugged on the trigger.

I felt my skull shatter.

Light.

I WAS STANDING BEHIND THE COUNTER. I WAS LOOKING OUT through the Snack Utopia's big front windows. The parking lot, the off-ramp from I-15, and even the distant muddy mountains were gone. There was nothing out there except for an almost blinding, white swirling material.

It looked just like creme filling.

I blinked, turned, and reached up for my forehead, running my fingers across it. There was no bullet hole, no gushing blood or dribbling brain bits. I then looked around the store, checking out all the mirrors. The place was deserted. The rednecks, the old Indian, and the cougher in the pajamas were gone.

Ting Ting Ting.

I nearly jumped out of my skin as the front door opened and then closed. But nobody walked in, at least no one that I could see.

"Service requested exalted ancient master of snacks and all things laden with salt and preservatives."

The voice came from in front of me, but down by the floor. I leaned forward and looked over the counter top. The thing stared up at me. It looked like a wiener dog whose legs had been replaced with crab legs. Big red-glass eyeballs dangled from bony-looking eye-stalks that protruded from its forehead.

"Guidance, kind master of the Greater People," it said. "Enlighten me about your rules, showing me the order within a universe of chaos."

I slumped forward, my knees giving out, and fell across the counter top. With a pincer hand, the crab-mutt reached into a pouch that hung from its neck and pulled out a small scrap of paper. It held it up before its bobbing eyes.

"Beer nuts?" it asked in a whisper.

"Regular or barbecue," I asked, not really understanding what I was saying, just letting instinct take over.

"Barbecue!" it howled.

"Aisle 12," I said mechanically.

The crab-mutt trotted away, losing traction as it barreled around the end of aisle six. It collided with a stack of lite beer and ricocheted off of it, and then it disappeared around the corner.

"Excellent, Lord."

I pushed myself off the counter and turned around.

The Spook stood behind me. His pasty-white skin was gone. Actually his whole face was gone. In its place was a bug face, complete with twitching mandibles, black glass golf-ball eyes, and swaying antennae.

You can only take so much so fast and then something has got to give. You either come up with an explanation or drop to the floor and start playing this-little-piggy-went-to-the-market with your toes. I'd never been much for playing with my toes. I grabbed onto the one thing that I knew was true.

I'd been shot in the head by the Spook.

But I wasn't dead or else I wouldn't be having this nightmare. And at that moment, that was exactly what I thought was happening to me.

This was simply a nightmare.

As I stared at the Spook's bug face, I was certain that my comatose butt was being wheeled into North Vegas Emergency, the doctors getting ready to pull a bullet out of my head. Weiner dogs with crab legs who had the munchies for beer nuts, and a 6 foot tall cockroach in a trench coat just couldn't be real.

At least that's what I thought at the time.Of course I was wrong.

"Why'd you blow my brain out?" I calmly asked the Spook. I saw no reason to get upset with what I thought was simply a hallucination.

"Not so, Lord," said the Spook. "Your magnificent brain, that organ of order and rules, is fully intact. You have been displaced some 187 million years into the future to become the Lord in Residence of the Temple dedicated to Earl's Snack Utopia. I am your conduit to the Lesser People of Earth."

I blinked and had to remind myself that this was nothing but a dream—one hell of a weird dream, but still, just a dream.

"Lesser People of Earth?" I asked.

"We are all that remain. The mammals, reptiles, fish and birds are all gone, evolved beyond mere physical reality, the machines of long ago man having shown their souls the way."

I should have known then and there that this was no dream. I simply am not that imaginative.

I pointed a finger at the Spook.

"But what exactly are you?" I asked.

"The Lesser People evolved from the insects of your time, our genes and DNA stretched to the ultimate, evolved as far as our potential allows, forever trapped in this reality, while the others of Earth have moved beyond us."

Bugs.

This was weird, very weird. I wondered just how severely damaged my brain was.

"And how do I fit into all of this?" I asked. At the time I figured I might be here for a while—until I came out of my coma.

"The Greater People left us the means to move through the ages, touch the past, witness those things of most religious significance and the most miraculous accomplishments, and to bring them back to our time so we may worship them."

I looked out around Earl's Snack Utopia.

This was just too weird, and actually a bit stupid.

"Earl's Snack Utopia?" I asked.

"Of course, Lord," the Spook said sincerely. "It epitomizes all that was magnificent and holy in 20th-century man."

"You're crazy," I said, "We've gone to every damn planet in the solar system, made computers smarter than half the people I know, have cured damn near every weird-ass disease to come along, and smashed every little asshole dictator bent on building an atom bomb. There hasn't been a major war during the entire century, not a hungry stomach left on the planet, and we even managed to patch up the ozone hole. With all that, you consider the most important thing we've done is to build Earl's Snack Utopia?"

The Spook kneeled and his mandibles twitched. "Yes, Lord."

I was certain that this little conversation meant that I didn't have enough brains left to fill a thimble. At that very moment I was probably being wheeled to the terminal vegetable ward of the hospital.

"And what do you want with me?" I asked, now certain that I'd be trapped in this nightmare until what was left of my brain finally sputtered to a halt.

You have been displaced some one-hundred and eighty-seven million years into the future to become Lord in Residence of the Temple dedicated to Earl's Snack Utopia.

"We beg of you to give guidance to the pilgrims of the Lesser People, showing them the rules, revealing the order."

"Huh?" I asked.

The Spook pointed to the crab-mutt who was now scurrying back along aisle six with a bag of barbecue beer nuts clenched in its snout.

I got it. These imaginary bug people from the far future, who thought the greatest accomplishment of the 20th century was the invention of junk food, wanted me to tell them what aisle their desired goodies were on.

"Sure, Spook," I said, as I wondered just how long this insanity would continue.

THEY WERE AN ATTENTIVE BUNCH. THEY WERE QUIET, respectful, orderly, and definitely big on rules and regulations. But I guess that made sense. After all, they were just bugs. I'd certainly seen enough ants blindly following each other in endless lines, moths getting zapped because some little rule in their head insisted they go for the light of a bug zapper, and a hive full of bees, all doing their bee-thing, making more honey than they could ever eat, just because the rules told them to make honey.

Bugs are definitely into rules.

Some 30 of them sat on the floor in front of the counter, cleaning antennae, licking at fur, and sucking sugary goo from their fingers. With their little rubbery faces, great big ball-bearing eyes, and fur-splotched bodies that looked to be built out of segmented plastic, they looked like a cross between ants and chimpanzees.

"Tell us again, Lord," asked the third one from the left.

I sighed. This was getting a bit stale. They wanted to hear the same thing over and over again. If I changed so much as a word, they'd get all agitated and go on a little rampage. Earlier in the day, a horde of locust men had melted down when I'd gotten so sick of repeating the tale of how the Keebler Elves had invented chocolate chips, that instead I told them that the elves had been nothing more than midget terrorists from Ireland, intent on creating an elf homeland south of Vegas. It took more than an hour to clean the Fritos and bean dip off the floor after that little episode.

Damned bugs.

"I met Dolly Madison in a home economics class when I was a freshman in high school," I said.

Their little black eyeballs grew wider, just as they had the last dozen times I'd told them this insane little tale. They were none too bright.

"Dolly couldn't even boil water when I first met her. She didn't know a donut from a stick of beef jerky, actually claimed that she was allergic to preservatives, and detested sponge cake."

"Oooohhhhhh," they all said in unison.

"It was then that I knew I had my work cut out for me. The first thing I had to do was to teach her how to grease a cookie sheet."

Several of the ant apes clapped.

Ting. Ting. Ting.

I ignored the sound of the front door being opened. The novelty of the bizarre creatures that came in and out of the store had lost all of its charm. I was more than ready to either wake up or for my brain to finally flat line.

"I used a stick of 100 percent animal lard, the most cholesterol saturated fat laden substance known to man," I said.

Again several clapped.

"Excuse me, Lord?"

I turned to my left. This was a big one, easily 6 feet tall. And it was the most human-looking one that had yet come in. The only insect-like aspect to it was its bristly beard and darting eyes.

"What will it be?" I asked. I only hoped that he didn't want beer. At the moment there were nearly a hundred little centipede-like creatures camped out around the reefers, praying to any brew imported from Europe. If this big guy went back there, I'd be scrapping centipede goo off the floor for hours.

"The rules are clear," he said. "Put it in the bag."

"And what is it?" I asked, not even mentioning the fact that he didn't have a bag. None of these guys possessed what one would call a rocket-scientist-caliber brain.

He reached into a trench coat pocket and pulled out a small piece of paper with something written across it. He stared at it, and I could imagine the little wheels in his bug head painfully grinding away.

"Money," he eventually said.

This was a bit different. Up until now, all these bug people had been interested in were junk food and beer. This bug obviously didn't understand what was going on here.

"Want a popsicle?" I asked.

He shook his head, reached into his coat pocket once more, and this time pulled out a pistol. "Money," he said.

I obeyed. No instinct was burned deeper into what was left of my brain than this one. I banged at the cash register. The drawer popped open. I reached in and pulled out a fistful of money which I held out toward him.

Bang!

I spun around, my left shoulder tearing away, bone shattering and a curtain of blood spraying above me. I screamed. I bit through my lower lip. I vomited and my pants filled with something warm as I hit the floor.

"Spook!" I screamed.

I clutched what was left of my left shoulder, and the pain curled my toes and popped my vertebrae.

"Money," said a voice.

The gun appeared from over the edge of the counter top. Bang!

My stomach imploded, driven into the linoleum floor, my spine shattering, intestines flying every which way. I hurt far too much to scream. It took several minutes before I died. And the whole time, the ant apes sat on top of counter, screaming at me to continue the saga of Dolly Madison, all the while throwing Goobers and Raisinets at me.

I could not get through the front doors—some force field kept me in. The windows were now made of some unbreakable substance, and if I so much as raised a hand against one of the bug people, what felt like a knitting needle was driven through my forehead.

I'D BEEN KILLED THREE MORE TIMES, and each time resurrected to find myself behind the counter. It was after being shot in the crotch and taking nearly a half hour to bleed to death as a horde of beetle men stuffed their orange stained faces with Nacho Doritos while dancing around me, that an idea occurred to me.

This was real.

The pain was simply too intense, the agony of dying simply too excruciating, for it to be just a nightmare. I had no facts, no absolute way of knowing. I simply believed it.

This was real.

And I had to get out.

**The Lesser People evolved from the insects of your time, our genes and DNA stretched to the ultimate, evolved as far as our potential allows, forever trapped in this reality...**

"Fudgsicles?" asked a spider-like creature with the face of a rat.

"Aisle four," I said pointing behind it. To not answer was to cause that knitting needle through the forehead.

"The Lesser People are so pleased."

I turned around. The Spook stood there, nibbling on a long strand of red licorice.

"I want out of here!" I screamed. "I want to go back!"

The Spook twitched his head left and right.

"Of course, Lord," he said.

My body tingled all over. I couldn't believe that it could be that easy, that all I had to do was ask. But then I reminded myself that I was of the Greater People, and the Lord of Earl's Snack Utopia.

"Once all the Lesser People have made the pilgrimage you will be returned," said the Spook.

That didn't sound good.

"And just how many are going to make the pilgrimage?" I asked.

"Sixty-seven billion, four-hundred and fifty-nine million, nine-hundred and fifty-three thousand, one-hundred and twelve," he said. "We are held in stasis, sleeping, waiting for the glorious moment of our pilgrimage."

"Shit," I mumbled. I should have known that the Spook would have the count down to the last bug. These bugs weren't bright, but they were damned exacting. At the rate they were crawling in and out of the Snack Utopia, I'd be here for several million years and probably get killed several billion times.

"No!" I screamed.

The Spook said nothing, but started to pry open a can of Vienna Sausages with its lower mandible.

My brain burned. I was desperate. I would be killed billions of times in some sort of quicki-mart religious ritual unless I figured a way out. I couldn't take this, couldn't do it. But I knew I'd have no choice. I'd be resurrected over and over again.

"Please," I begged.

The Spook popped a Vienna Sausage into his mouth.

And then I had an idea.

"There might be a faster way for everyone to make the pilgrimage," I said.

The Spook stuck out a long bug tongue and began to lap up the juice out of the bottom of the Vienna sausage can.

"You can go to the past, right?" I said.

The Spook nodded.

"Then why not just send the whole bunch back to my time. There's got to be tens of thousands of junk food places there. All the Lesser People could make the pilgrimage right now, rather than being held in stasis until it's their turn."

The Spook's head twitched back and forth, and he began to clean his antennae with his tongue. "We cannot do that," he said. "It violates the rule left to us by the Greater People. Their rule states that we may bring one from the past, recreate the environment, and then the pilgrimage begins."

"Change the damn rule!" I screamed.

"The Lesser People do not change rules," he said. "We obey the rules. It is our nature."

That much I certainly had come to learn. But I was not about to give up so easily.

"I am the Lord of Earl's Snack Utopia!" I screamed. "I am of the Greater People, and I will change your rule."

The Spook stopped cleaning his antennae, and his head ratcheted back and forth several times. "That is your prerogative," he said.

I shook my head. Too damn easy. But I didn't stop to think about it, didn't want to take the chance that the Spook would change his bug brain.

This is the point at which I destroyed the world.

"Then I'll change the damn rule!" I screamed. "The whole lot of you will go back to the past, and you can visit every damn junk food place there is."

"We can implement that rule," said the Spook. "But we will have to assume human shape as I did when originally visiting Earl's Snack Utopia."

That was perfect. Every junk food place on the planet would be swamped by vacant-eyed, brain-dead bug people from the future for a few days, and then it would be all over.

"Do it!" I shouted.

"We will follow the new rule, Lord," said the Spook.

BEFORE I COULD SO MUCH AS TWITCH, THE SPOOK HAD pulled his pistol from out of his coat, aimed it at my head, and pulled the trigger.

As my head shattered, our world was destroyed.

I'd been so stupid.

So damned stupid.

If I'd left well enough alone, let myself be killed a few billion times, I would have been returned to Earl's Snack Utopia at the very moment I'd been kidnapped, and that would have been that.

Nothing would have been changed.

But when I came back, I returned to a world I barely recognized. I'd never seen so many damned lawyers before. The only thing there seemed to be more of than lawyers were insurance salesmen. There is now something called the Internal Revenue Service and Medicare. I still can't figure out exactly what it is they do. The federal government is now the largest employer in the country, with millions of people doing nothing but shuffling paper, following rules, and filling little cubbyholes with memos that then get shredded by other people without the memos ever being read.

People?

I figured it out soon enough. I'd destroyed the world.

Those 67 billion bugs didn't just come for a visit. They came to stay, live, take up jobs, and totally destroy everything.

I figured the first of them started coming in around the turn of the century. And we haven't seen anything yet. I did a rough calculation, added up the number of bureaucratic, paper-pushing, rule-following, brain-dead, glassy-eyed little bug people that have been destroying our world for the last century. I figure that at tops there's been a couple of billion of them.

That's just two billion.

We're in big trouble.

There's another 65 billion to go.

I don't understand this time travel thing, why I can remember the world as it was, before the arrival of the bugs, but I can. So you now know why I blew up those four Big Marty's Snack Shacks. Twenty-three dead bug people isn't much, but you've got to start somewhere.

You've got to believe me.

You've got to take up the fight before we're completely destroyed. It's us or them. If you don't believe any of this, figuring that I'm just one more raving loon in the nut house, I offer up one final piece of evidence, something that none of you can ignore, irrefutable proof that our world is being destroyed by bug people from the future.

The Department of Motor Vehicles.

Enough said.

God save us. □

I would be killed billions of times in some sort of quicki-mart religious ritual unless I figured a way out. I couldn't take this, couldn't do it. But I knew I'd have no choice.

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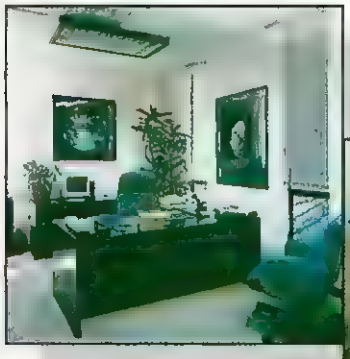

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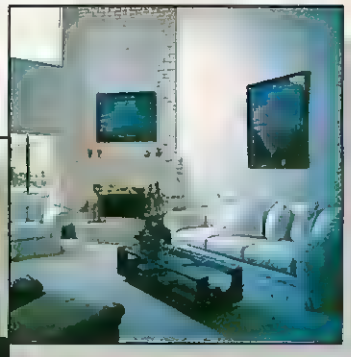

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Those who paid to gawk at her in the sideshow of Vekk's Traveling Circus considered her a freak of nature. But the night sky held out the promise that she would someday be something more.

# FREAKS

BY JAMES DAVID AUDLIN

*Illustration by Bob Eggleton*

THERE IS NEVER SUCH STILLNESS AS THE STILLNESS OF DEATH: YOU expect the human form to be always kinetic, always moving, always restless, like the ocean from which its first ancestors came. And even when you see it resting, still you expect at least to see the chest rise and fall, the eyelids quiver, the vein at the neck to pulse. And when it never moves at all, when it is death that brings a body to stillness, the neverness of unmoving in that body is an emptiness which no amount of watching can fill. You stare at the body, and you almost see the gentle rise of the chest, so used are you to seeing that sign of life. You expect any moment to see the eyes open, and the familiar lips to part and say, "Just fooling!" But all your expectations vanish into that stillness like air into the vacuum of space and are reduced to less than nothing. There is no stillness as empty as the stillness of death.

But this corpse was different: it looked as if it could hardly contain itself, as if it were holding its breath, as if it were trembling on the edge of bursting into uncontrolled laughter....

This, we knew, it would not do. For the man was dead. And our minds told us, as we looked at the still form heaped in the sawdust, once you're dead you stay that way.

Still our minds traced over and over again his last misstep on the high wire, his wobbling, how he quickly squatted down to concentrate his weight and lower his center of gravity, arms outstretched over the crowd as if granting a blessing. Still we saw the unanticipated inexplicable slip of his foot, the turning slow fall of his body through the air, his upward lunge for the wire falling short as it was snatched out of his reach, the slow shock of the Lady Acrobat his wife, the shouting of the crowd fading into dusty silence. The thud as he struck the sawdust. The scurrying of the crew to take his body away. The rush to get the show moving again. Looking at the faces shocked into white stillness, the children tugging on their parents' sleeves, and saying to ourselves, "The show must go on, the show must go on." The halfheartedness of the performers now very aware of their own mortality, too: the Lion-Tamer looking at his own trembling hands, the Sword Swallower's throat constricted in grief and fear, the Sad-Faced Clown unable to laugh. All of them seeing images of the Spider's hurtling body and the very still body in the ring with a twinkling cloud of sawdust above it...and not what is now going on. They go on with the show, they laugh and preen as they do their stunts, but their hearts are not in it.

They brought the body back to his wagon, the one the Spider shared with his wife, the Lady Acrobat. In the morning they would roust out the local undertaker but, for tonight, they would keep the circus tradition of letting him lie in state in his wagon. The gaily painted wheels, the gaudy colors, the gold-painted letters advertising the name of this traveling circus, all these belied the darkness of death that lay within.

Evening slowly fell with the muted gold of trombones across the field. In the town church bells rang farewell to day. The shadows thickened. The last show was over, and all the children had gone home with their parents in their carts or carriages or on tired feet. One by one the stoves flickered out in the circus wagons, the inhabitants making no move to add more coal, but staring into the falling flames, seeing again, over and over, the slow spinning fall of the Spider, the thud of his body in the sawdust. One by one the wagons went dark and the performers lay down in their cold beds to relive the unspeakable horror.

At last only one fire still burned, the Lady Acrobat still refusing to sleep, tossing all her jagged bits of anger and pain into the fire one by one, in the form of single shards of coal. All her hatred for her husband, who never treated her right, all her hatred for this life of performing in the same patched tent town after town after town, all her frustration for not living in one place like ordinary folk, with a yard and children to run around in it, and all her anger that the Spider has dared to leave her alone like this. Looking at him, lying in

the shadows of his bunk, his body looking like it is straining to keep gales of laughter inside. She felt unreasonable anger that he, dead, should find all this so funny, while she was left alone unable to express her own bitterness.

All the well-wishers were gone by now, all the women of the circus family and some of the men, and she was glad to be rid of them. They only knew her husband as a happy jovial man, a man who was indeed always bursting into laughter, a man who was entertaining and charming, for whom any woman would give even her good name to have as her man. And had; the Lady Acrobat was his fourth wife, and there had been many relationships marked by less propriety than that. These circus people who had come to call did not know about the drinking that led to violence, or the more than rough ways he had to satisfy his surging sexuality. They knew nothing. They were jealous of her, and she was only angry. And now he was dead, and all the anger, though fed bit by bit into this bitter fire, left her feeling broken and tired, as if it were she who had died, and not he.

It was then that my mother came. My mother had waited until late at night, so no one would see her come. It is only through my mother's eyes that I have seen these events, for I was not yet born. For she has shared with me the pictures of what she saw from beneath her deep hood: through them only I know the events I am describing to you: the death of the Spider and all the events that come tumbling down to today.

**My mother. I always remembered her as beautiful, but I could never actually remember what she looked like; I just recall a sort of warmth and a darkness out of which she would sing to me without a song...**

She was the Fortuneteller for the circus, for in those days circuses always had to have one of those: a woman who walked in mystery, who dressed like a Gypsy in jewels and scarves, whose long fingers with painted nails would make passes over a crystal ball while she stared into it, always saying, "By the Pharaohs of Ancient Araby," and making guesses, sometimes vague and sometimes shrewd, for the paying customers. My mother was none of that. She was, impossible though it sounds, the genuine article. She sported no outrageous clothing, but only a cloak and hood. She used no crystal ball, but only spoke her prognostications without preamble or flamboyant show. And what she said was specific, never vague, and it always came true, no matter how long it might take. The ultimate proof of her talent was in the fact that the circus people, who rarely had two spare nickels to rub together, were glad and even fearful to seek her out to have their fortunes told. When they asked, "How do you do it?" she always replied, "I know the stars, that is what makes me an astrologer."

So now I see it, her memories that are now my memories, since she has long ago given them to me: I see the wrought iron steps leading up to the Spider's wagon, the bright red door now dark in the moonless night, and my mother's sleeve-hidden hand coming up and rapping three times. Now I see again, as I have so many times before, the door opening, and the Lady Acrobat standing there, glaring at me, at my mother, with impatience and annoyance.

"It is late, I know that," my mother's voice says, though I cannot hear the sound of it, just as people never remember the *sound* of their own voices but only what they said. How I wish I could hear that voice, that voice I know I must have heard myself many times but cannot now remember.

The Lady Acrobat, standing there, frowning her displeasure, saying nothing.

"I have come to pay my last respects, if I may."

After a long pause thick with ill-concealed displeasure, the Lady Acrobat accedes to circus custom and opens the door. My mother comes in. She looks about the little wagon, at the walls lined with little cabinets to hold their few belongings, the small table, the stove with its door still swung open, and the fire inside fed with anger and grief.

The Lady Acrobat says, in a deceptively matter-of-fact way, "You were wrong, you know."

Now it is my mother's turn to be silent. She says nothing, just looks at the flames inside the stove, as if into the heart of this bitter woman. I do not see right now the Lady Acrobat's face in these memories of my mother; just the fire.

"You were wrong, you know," she says again. "You told me he would leave me for another woman. You told me that he would tire of my beauty and leave me for a woman with no beauty, and that she would bear his child, not I."

At last my mother speaks, and I feel the calm in her voice, the absent way of responding as if already she has gone into the trance that opens up for her the teachings of the stars. "Well, he has left you, so it seems."

"But not for another woman!" the new-made widow exclaims. "Not for some ugly woman who will give him the son we should have had!" It is hard to tell if she is gloating that the Astrologer is wrong or if anger charges her words with vehemence.

"That we shall have to see," my mother replies.

"That we shall have to see? But he is *dead! Dead*, do you hear me? Dead!" Now at last, inexplicably, the Lady Acrobat crumples to the floor, crying with the fury of a sudden cloudburst. I have often wondered as I review these memories not my own if these tears were genuine or produced for show.

But my mother has no interest any longer in the Lady Acrobat. Now she looks for the first time at the body lying on the bunk, as slowly she glides over to it. She looks at this corpse, this man who so often brought tears of laughter to the eyes of the audiences, this body that flaunts the convention of death to lie with a surpassing stillness, this man who for long and long has been the one she herself desired to lie with, this body that teeters on the edge of bursting into laughter at the very idea of finding itself dead, and she walks over to it, and takes the huge hairy hand of the Spider in hers. Immediately with her touch, the pent-up laughter explodes out of this corpse like a balloon bursting for joy, and the wagon shakes with the sudden release of manly mirth.

I do not see his wife, the Lady Acrobat, at this point in my mother's memories, but it is not difficult for me to imagine her stifled sobs, her choked surprise at watching this dead body come alive again to its feet and walk out of its wagon with the Astrologer. I do see the two pairs of feet going down the wrought iron steps, and hear the laughter bubbling up into the warm dark night smelling of lamp oil and elephant droppings, and feel the warm strong arm of the Spider about my mother's waist.

And then I hear a shriek from inside the wagon and the sound of someone clattering down the steps, and I feel myself, that is, my mother, being forcibly spun around, and the veiling hood torn back from my, that is, her face.

I see the face of the Lady Acrobat. Looking at me, at my mother, with shock, astonishment, fear and fury. I see the horror she feels at the revealed features of my mother. I know she sees a face that is strange, impossible, and not that of a typical woman. Though I do not know what my mother looked like, this I know: that the Lady Acrobat saw something she found extraordinary and fearful. And I see slowly rising in that woman's ordinary human face, ordinary except in being extraordinarily beautiful, but not beautiful enough to keep her husband from his philandering, the slow shock of comprehension.

"You!" she breathes, looking at my mother. "You meant he would leave me for *you!*" Comprehension now is releasing her fury all over again, and my mother and the Spider quickly depart into the shadows of this moonless night before she is moved to action.

That night, in the warm hayloft of a farmer's barn, with the sound of horses shifting in their stalls down below, I was conceived. I shy away at this point from the memories my mother gave me, unable to make myself intrude on this one night when she was fully ac-

cepted as a woman. Though the desire burns in me to know what my mother looked like, I give these two their moment of privacy. I know there came the moment when in the darkness the Spider took away her shrouding mantle, still the darkness veiled her strange form from his eyes, and my mother's memories are of her looking at him, not of him at her.

For a while the Spider, my father, was quite content with this strange woman who brought him back to life. But he never seemed to recall being dead, talking of it, if at all, as a big joke. They went, often hungry, from circus to carnival, working in those rare intervals when it both pleased them to work and a job was there to be had. I recall, through my mother's memories, that sometimes her lover took care of the caged animals, or sometimes worked as a roustabout. My mother consistently sold her visions of the future, dutifully following the Spider whenever he was fired. For they were never with any show for very long; the Spider was now, since his return to life, even more uproarious than before and far more given to drinking, gambling, womanizing, and starting violent fights with coworkers, and he was frequently dismissed.

I cannot say if it was he who left her, or she who left him, for my mother's memories are not clear on that point, as if they had long been repressed before she bequeathed them to me, but I know that in time they drifted apart. She continued to work, even as I waxed within her womb, and I know that by the time I was born, she was alone again, wrapped once again in her familiar, comfortable solitude, as she had always been before.

And never has a mother loved as truly as she loved me. She never spoiled me or punished me, never raised her voice, but was always there with her great and perfect love. My own memories are what I have of these days; I remember my mother as warmth and darkness, the close and comforting darkness out of which she would sing to me with her strange silent melodies. I could not have told you even in the least matter what my mother looked like, the sound of her voice, or anything like that; my memories of her have nothing in them even resembling sensory data, I remember only the feeling of her love, her joy in having me, and her wordless, soundless songs.

There is just this photograph: one photograph only, which I have carried in my wallet my whole life. It is a very early picture, apparently taken with one of George Eastman's first commercially-produced box cameras. And all it shows, standing outside a circus tent, is a tall grizzled man with a bristling shock of salt-and-pepper hair and the beginnings of a paunch, dressed in a short, spangled circus vest and striped pants, and a small figure next to him, robed and cowled like a medieval monk. My mother and my father. The Astrologer and the Spider. I know my mother always had an aversion to cameras, and I am surprised that she suffered this one to be taken, or that, taken, she did not destroy it. I never asked her how it came to be, but it is in my possession, and it is all I have of my mother. Except perhaps my being.

My mother loved me as no mother has loved. To her I was beautiful and perfect, but never did she spoil me with that love. Surely she was glad, after long years of silence and solitude, to at last have someone to love and by whom to be loved. We were so close that it was virtually one being, virtually a double-star that radiated the warmth of love in a turning embrace. I wanted nothing more in those early days than to grow up to be as beautiful as I knew my mother was.

But not so for any others. Children feared me and hated me. If they saw my face, they invariably called me monster and threw stones or beat me up. Children can be cruel, and to this day I do not easily get along with them. I would run from them, my eyes streaming tears, back to my mother, in whose embrace I would know myself to be beautiful again.

And she would soothe me and hold me and sing to me in that soundless way that sang inside my mind. And she would tell me things to console me; things I didn't understand then, but which have kept me going since. She would tell me that I was not meant to be alone, that some day I would find a companion who would love me. I was little; I am not sure now if she said, "There are others like you," or if it was, "There are others who will like you"—if she meant I would find others who resemble me or others who would accept me as I am. Perhaps she meant both.

She never earned a great deal of money as an astrologer; we always seemed on the brink of starvation, she and I. Though her predictions were uncannily accurate, she would be long gone before the truth of her observations came home to her clients. And when next she might visit their town with this or that circus, they would be afraid of her, afraid of this accuracy, and stay away. For while it is human nature to be interested in the future, people know deep down that fortunetellers are retailers only of shrewd guesses and vague generalizations, so they are not afraid of the hearing of what is only, at root, entertainment. But when one hears the future related in cold, bare detail, even if it is a prophecy of good fortune, one still hesitates to come back, fearing that next time the prognosticator may see ill fortune.

Whenever I asked her how she could see the future, she would only say she knew the stars. When as a child I begged her to teach me about the stars so I too could know the future, she would only say the time was not yet. We would go out at night sometimes, when everyone was asleep, and look together at the stars. She would tell me about stars and planets, things that sounded like the stories of Wells and Verne that I might get to read in some dusty library or other place where I would spend my free time when whatever circus we were traveling with would spend a few days in a larger town. She told me stories, stories I was sure she was making up, stories better than any I might find in books, of worlds where there were only oceans, or worlds of flying beings, or worlds where intelligent plants dreamed great floral dreams.

When I was older, she began to tell me more. So slow was her teaching me what I am sure she wanted above all else to give me, that it was not like she was instructing me, but that slowly, bit by bit, I just learned and remembered these things. Each little tidbit of knowledge she imparted left me hungering for more. I remember her one chilly autumn night pointing up in the direction of Fomalhaut and saying, "That is your star." Often I would wonder what she meant, and many times I have dreamed of that star, a small star near Fomalhaut, too small and too distant to be seen from Earth, and of the planet that swings around it, on which there are people who look like my mother. But when I would wake again to the dullness of earthly morning light, I would not be able to recall their faces; only that among them my mother would have been at home, with no need to hide her features within a hood. I have always supposed these dreams were but a fantasy, an expression of my desire to be free of the hatred and revulsion people feel when they see me.

But these dreams have always been bittersweet for me, I who resemble neither my mother nor my father, but an awful interpenetration of the looks of both. My face and body are truly ugly, horrible beyond belief, and it is simply because the normal human template of my father and the appearance of my mother, surely just as beautiful in its own way, have chosen me as their battleground, tugging my features between them into a twisted ruin. I would look at the girlie pictures in magazines, the ones the boys hid furtively under their mattresses, wishing I could be attractive like them, and being even more disheartened by finding them unattractive to me.

"Are there people like us?" I would ask her. When I was younger, she would not answer, but only hold me and sing to me with her silent song. When I was older, she would sometimes say yes, but that they had to hide from shame and fear. So many things I should have asked her, but I was simply too immature at the time to know what I needed to know from her. And I did not know, not having her gift or curse of foresight, what was all too soon going to take my mother from me.

She must have known. I remember in the last few weeks it seemed she never let me go, but held me close as much as possible. After her long day telling fortunes, when she would be exhausted in her spirit from the psychic effort she had to make to listen to the stars, she would still make a simple supper for us over the tiny stove, her arm around me as she stirred the stew. And later she would cuddle me in her lap, as if I were still an infant, and I would press my cheek against the rough wool of her hood, feeling the warmth of her body through the heavy material, and be content. She must have known, but she said nothing about it. But I could tell in those final days that she was desperate to be close to me as much as possible.

The day came. This memory too is a difficult one to describe, and it is not a vicarious memory, but all mine. Some farmer, irate over a prediction of the loss of his farm and finding it true, was convinced that she was part of a scheme with the bankers. While his loss was just one of the early ones, as drought and later Depression were to turn the Midwest into a dustbowl, he was blind to everything but his raging desire for revenge. He came to my mother's little booth and, in full sight of her customer and me, shot her once, twice. My mother crumpled quickly to the ground. The customer, an elderly woman, rushed out in fear. After a few moments the farmer left, his fury spent. Only I was left, with this tiny body of the only person in the whole world who loved me. About this shapeless cloaked form there was no sign of laughter. My tears were bitter but I fought them back. There was no one left to protect me from the derision I would surely receive if I cried.

There was no burial and no funeral. I had no money, and I was sure no one would provide a grave or a funeral for a penniless monster. It fell to her only child to carry the shrouded little form out into the forest down the road and leave it in a secluded clearing underneath the brittle sky.

I joined the circus now not as the child of an employee, but as an employee myself. It is not that I wanted to, but I had to, if I wanted to eat. There was no time for grief, only for work. My twisted hands were no good for holding tools, so there was no career for me as a roustabout. I had no talent for juggling or animal training, or even for my father's work on the high wire. Nor, and this is important, did I look the part. The audience desires to see beautiful people in beautiful costumes, and not monsters like me. And, lastly, I could not divine the future.

There was no choice. My only path lay in being a freak. For that I was eminently well qualified. So in Vekk's Traveling Circus I joined the freak show. Three shows daily in the larger towns, and one or two in the littler villages through which the wagons hardly slowed down. The days of these traveling circuses were coming to an end, and everyone sensed it. The quality of the performers and the sizes of the crowds had both decreased. Vekk's was one of the last, and it only survived by flouting the pretensions to dignity other circuses had cherished until they perished. So Vekk, the owner, assembled the loathsome, the ugly, the obscene, and paraded it before audiences to gawk at and feel superior.

The freak show was one of the highlights. We came out, dwarves and gargantuas, two-headed babies and androgynes, ape-men and elephant-men and lizard-men, and displayed our bodies for the insulting pittances Vekk gave us. I was billed as Nightmare Woman. They paid their quarters to look at my body, naked before their superior features, and feasted their eyes on my misshapen limbs and my patches of coarse hair. And they left again, content with their drab and common lives.

What does such a life do to these people as individuals and as a group? What does it feel like to be forever categorized as nothing more than a freak, an aberration of nature? On the one hand, there was the constant pressure of feeling that we were inferior, and this could lead in time to fear, anger, or even madness. People paid money to laugh at us, to ridicule us, to feel superior. Even when we were at our best, we still felt guilt and shame for letting ourselves be used and our very nature insulted like this. On the other hand, this display of our aberrant nature could give rise to a certain pride and nobility, a determined tendency to support one another.

There were two major categories of freaks: those who were born that way and those whose abnormalities were simulated. The "People", as they called themselves, prided themselves in being truly what they claimed to be, without having to resort to artifice. But the "Professionals" were equally proud of being, as they saw themselves, artists. All too often these two groups, put willy-nilly together by their employers, were at odds with each other. Enmity was always boiling just below the surface.

One night I remember a Professional named Ellis, who became Egor the Ape-Man, was removing his props, the false misshapen nose and the hunch he strapped onto his back. Tempers being as hot as the weather in this torrid Missouri summer that preceded us to every town in which we pitched the big top, a fight started for no reason at all between him and Billy, one of the People, a real dwarf, whose face was distorted by a harelip. Quickly the fracas was magnified as both groups dove in to defend their brother. I stood aside, fearful and oddly peaceful, watching honor sullied and defended with the throwing of fists. With all my being I willed them silently to stop fighting. Curiously, in moments tempers began to dissipate. But, even as they wore themselves out and called each other names based on their nature or their pretense, the same names that the "Outsiders" always showered on them, these freaks suddenly understood. They wept and embraced each other.

The next day there was still the usual friendly bantering name-calling as they prepared for the show, but underneath it there was now a strange caught breath of deep love and respect.

But even as a kind of bond drew these freaks, People and Professionals, together, I felt less and less a part of the circle. It was not so much that I wanted to be alone, for truly I wanted more than anything else to love and be loved, but that they withdrew from me. Slowly it came to me that they were now afraid of me: if somehow, as I suspected, I had brought peace and harmony to them, healing them as my mother once brought life to my father, so now after the fact, I continued to be the cause of their unanimity because their common fear was focused on me. They knew me to be different. I was not an ordinary freak. I was neither one of the People nor was I a Professional.

I walked away. Suddenly. Walked away one afternoon from the freaks, from Vekk's Traveling Circus, from life. I want to think that I walked away from all this directly to you, but that is not so. The truth is, I was in the deepest shadows I have ever known. For days I walked through the dying fields and farms of Iowa, filthy and starving, filled with a sickness of living. I think I was really trying to run away from myself. I did not see anything of the malady of drought: the parched soil with nothing growing in its shrunken furrows, or the lined faces of the families departing westward with their dusty belongings roped to the family car. I saw instead a miasma of pain, a montage of all the injustices which had been heaped on me by the freaks and others in Vekk's show. Apples with razor blades inside. My belongings broken or stolen. Whispered conversations with the snarl of hateful laughter ceasing as I came near. I knew they wanted me gone. So I left.

It was miles on my misshapen legs, miles and hours before I had walked out the worst of the anger and despair. Evening found me walking along a dirt highway cut between fields of stillborn stalks of corn. There was no breeze at all; not a sound from the dried, yel-

lowing tassels. My stomach had given up trying to attract my attention. I wanted only to die.

There was a small hill, surrounded by the unspeaking corn, rising up in a lighter, grassy green over the shadowing fields. I went up onto that hill and prepared myself to die. I laid my tired, hideous body down on the crown of that hill, and watched the colors drain out of the sky. I willed my breathing to slow, my heart to beat an adagio. I felt I could will death to come. The air chilled my skin, but I no longer felt it. I felt nothing.

Some time passed, with the hush of expectant quiet that trembles the moment just before the hands of the conductor sweep down and the symphony begins. But this moment went on forever. I was not able to perceive it. I had all but ceased to breathe. The darkness settling like a flock of invisible birds over all the land was nothing compared to the darkness that slowly choked all my senses. Amidst the gathering clouds of failing eyesight a small star still flickered, a trembling still lamp floating on the oceans of the void. The darkness crowded round it, and it guttered on the brink of extinction.

"That is your star, that is your star," a voice said, but I did not hear it. "That is your star," but there was hardly anyone left to listen. My mother's voice, some shred of recollection shouted, and the grinding vaporous clouds of shadow moved back a bit. Around it the shape of a fish emerged, etched out in little lights against an infinite black. A memory stirred and named the picture the Piscis Austrinus. The Southern Fish. "That is your star." Surrounded by other pictures, Aquarius and Capricorn and the Sculptor, this little star nestled in the arm of flaming Fomalhaut, called out to me, to whatever was left of me. Something like a flood broke loose and I saw a child, held in silvered arms and sucking greedily on a breast soft with shining down. My mother, I hoped and prayed this was: my mother, holding me. I saw fingers, long and slender, shining as if with liquified moonbeams. Fingers long like mine but not knotted with the despair of conflicting appearances. An arm, a breast, skin glimmering with glowing velvet, not the coarse man's hair like weeds between the ugly bald patches that are my own. My mother, my mother.

My mother, holding me up to the sky, an autumn sky like this one, and saying to this infant as later she would say to the girl, "That is your star." My mother, remembering her own mother's memories, bequeathed to her as her people always did. Like two mirrors lined up and reflecting an infinite series of the same scene, I saw my grandmother lifting my mother up to that same shining speck, and her mother lifting her, and hers lifting her, and all of them saying, "That is your star. Never forget. That is your star." Not with words, or maybe the particular human language in which the mother spoke only dimly echoed the force of what was said, but that is the sense of it, what each mother said, as if in one supreme and glorious moment *outside* time, to each daughter. I heard them say it in older forms of English, in Medieval French, in late Latin. But always the same powerful teaching was the core of it.

Was I dreaming? Was I delirious with approaching death? For there was a mother, way back in this seemingly endless series, who lifted her child up not by night to a tiny distant mote of light trembling at the brink of visibility, but in the light of day, to a sun, a blueish sun, casting its gentle rays upon the surface of a land I could not name. Now the pattern flew back, but effortlessly, for it was not millions of mothers, one after the other lifting their daughters to the radiance of this unknown sun, but an archetype: the Allmother lifting up the Alldaughter. All the mothers who ever were joined in this sacred ritual, lifting their daughters, themselves, for the daughter was always to grow and become the mother, and dedicating her to the star, the source of light and warmth that meant motherhood to them.

"What star is this?" I asked.

And you said, for this was indeed the moment when you came into my life, "It is your home." I looked at you and I saw my mother's face, the face that had always been hidden in hoods, shielded from cameras. But not just my mother, but her mother, revealed to mine in the gift of memory. And all the mothers, united in this sharing of memories. "It is your home," you said, "and as long as you come to this light, you will be at home." Or words to that effect, for you spoke not in earthly words.

"Mother? You always said you knew the stars, that *that* was how you could tell the future."

"Listen to your daughter's memories, my child. For they are mine too. The mother and the daughter are always one." I felt in my arms a child, and looked and saw and knew that it was my own daughter. Somewhere I could sense the smile of my mother.

No, it was only a memory. A future-memory? A memory of what was not true. Me? A daughter? The Nightmare Woman? What man would ever want to lie with me? My body was alive again, on that great bowl of a hill arching toward the flaming stars. "Mother?" I called, but there was now no answer. Me? A daughter?

I looked up again to that little star, too distant for its tinge of blue to be discernible. My mother's people. From a distant star, like in storybooks I'd read. But a long time ago. Hundreds, maybe thousands of years ago. Storybooks. Stories of elves, perhaps, of goddesses always named for a star, Ishtar, Astarte, Inanna, of a womankind not human but not wholly unlike, who perhaps came here from another world, who lived in the earth but were not of it.

With coming alive again, I found my body itching. Nerve endings, which had shut down, began to flow again with life. I rubbed my skin through my clothes, but it was not enough. As the itching threatened to drive what little was left of my sanity away, I tore off my shabby clothes. My whole body, I found to my shock, was falling apart under my eyes. Where I had scratched skin and hair were now sloughing off in hunks. Was I dying? Now, when I found I no longer wanted to die? Could not be; the itching surely was a sign of life, not death. And as the scabrous integument fell away in massive chunks, as dry as the parched Midwest, I saw beneath it a soft silver I recognized immediately. The memory of my mother holding me to her breast rose up again before my eyes. Her skin, iridescent silver down shining in the darkness as she lifts me up to the star. My skin, as I rubbed away the last shreds of what once was, was now identical to her skin. I felt my face, my new face, revealed from beneath the old tissue now exuviated, and knew it to be the same as her own, as all those mothers and daughters who had been one and the same in this sacred moment of dedication to the remembered star.

"Listen to your daughter's memories," she, you, had said. I listened and knew, even if not in words, that I had died and been reborn. That I had left behind an ugly adolescence, and had not reached maturity. That my body had not been a battlefield for different species, but only what my people have always looked like before adulthood comes. That I was conceived not by the Spider, but by the touch of love which, in that moment when it mattered not what my mother looked like, he held her in his arms in the sweet-smelling hay. That my mother indeed truly knew the stars, for she was from another star, and that my mother indeed truly could know the future, for she was one with her own granddaughter and granddaughter's granddaughter.

"Listen to your daughter's memories," and I listened and knew that for you and me, for our people, the people of the star, time is not a line but a circle. That you and I, mother and daughter, daughter and mother, are virtually a double-star that radiates the warmth of love in a turning embrace. That some day I would give birth to you, my mother my daughter, and hold you up to the autumn sky and say, "That is your star." □

Taggart hungrily listened to Peregrine's crazy tales of a better life on their ruined planet. He knew it was foolish to believe the old man – but madness was preferable to death.

# OFF TO SEE THE WIZARD

BY THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

*Illustration by Pat Morrissey*

OUT BEYOND THE LIMITS OF CLEAR vision, Taggart saw a black speck slowly growing larger.

It was unusual for an animal to wander about alone. The pack in- stinct ruled, and loners were easy prey, quick meals. Taggart massaged the wrench nervously between his fingers, watching the figure steadfastly approach the ruins.

A minute passed and the only sound was the wind keening through the vanes of the windmill above his head. Another minute, and Taggart knew it was a *man* coming toward his position.

*Another man.*

A coldness passed through him. To hear another human voice again, to listen to the thoughts of someone else....The thought excited him as few could. The palms of his hand grew moist; the wrench felt slippery. There was a dryness in his throat.

From the height of the tower, he had a clear view of the man. The stranger wore a long, flowing garment, a cape of some sort that flapped

and billowed in the breeze. He wore a military helmet, although Taggart saw what seemed to be a long plume jutting from it, swaying and bouncing with each step. The man also pulled a small two-wheeled cart behind him, its rubber tires leaving thin lines in its wake. The cart was piled high with unidentifiable objects that were bulging out from beneath a piece of canvas hastily tied down with rope. His steps were slow and almost mincing at times, which suggested someone of advanced years, and this puzzled Taggart. There was nothing in the direction from which the stranger had come. Nothing but desolate, scarred earth. He must have walked a great distance. Taggart slowly stood and watched the man, who now was less than 50 meters away, then half of that. He stopped. Looked up.

The man dropped the tow-bar and cupped both hands before his face. "Hello! Hello, up there! You don't plan to kill me, do you?"

*Kill him?* Taggart was stunned by the words. He had never imagined such a greeting. Hesitantly, he heard himself reply: "No, no, of course not! You're welcome here!" He stood against the platform railing, replacing the wrench in his tool pouch. "Here, wait! Wait till I can get down." God, it felt strange to be talking to someone. Taggart had been little more than a child the last time he'd spoken to another person.

The stranger put a finger to the brim of his helmet; gave a grandiose, sweeping bow; and stood up, smiling broadly. As Taggart climbed down the tower, the man picked up the bar and started pulling his cart toward the base of the windmill. The stranger's words lingered in Taggart's mind. Why this talk of killing? Was the old man trying to put him off guard? Maybe it was the stranger who was planning the killing. Taggart paused for a moment, still several meters from the ground. No, it was unfair to get suspicious so quickly. Perhaps he should be wary of the old man, but certainly nothing more.

Dropping to the earth, Taggart dusted his hands nervously on his pants, and watched the man draw close to him. At the little distance that separated them, Taggart was able to study his features in great detail. The stranger's face was indeed quite old. Older in fact than anyone Taggart had ever seen. Beneath the rim of the helmet, a few wisps of silver-white hair danced upon a seamed forehead. Great bushy white eyebrows huddled over the man's sunken eyes—two black ball bearings, recently oiled. His nose was thick and long, bent noticeably to the left. The man's thin, colorless lips were almost lost amid a ragged, bleached-white beard. And everywhere there were lines, deep grooves and pockets where the years lay scored. Taggart looked at the man's hands—white, gnarled skin stretched tautly over the bones. The fingers moved like insect legs, in quick, jerky motions.

"Name's Peregrine," said the stranger, extending one of his spidery hands. "What's yours?"

"Taggart. Nice to meet you, sir." The man's hand felt dry, rough.

"You alone out here?" The old man looked past him into the ruined vista of buildings and machinery.

Taggart nodded.

"Yeah, well...look, I been walking a long way and I could sure use a drink of cold water. Got any?"

"Yes, back at the house. Let's go, and I'll get you some."

Peregrine laughed again, smiling through his wiry beard. "Now you're talking, son. Let's surely go!"

Taggart put away his tools and picked up his bag, pointing the way back to his shelter. "Where have you come from, Mr. Peregrine?"

Taggart also wanted to ask him why he had that long pink feather stuck on the side of his helmet, but was afraid to.

Peregrine started pulling the little cart along behind them. He smacked his lips and said, "Well, I came from a lot of places since that goddamned rock hit us. Listen, son, you ever heard of King Hamlet?"

Taggart shook his head.

"Yeah, well, I been with the king, helping him straighten out a few problems in his court. And then there was—say, what about Captain Ahab? Heard of him?"

"No, I'm sorry, I haven't."

"Well, I was with the captain for a whale, I mean a while. We was out hunting down this mutant creature that was botherin' the people round his parts."

"People? You mean there's still lots of people left?" Taggart felt his own pulse jump.

Peregrine stood up and waved his arms expansively. "Why, hell yeah! Taggart, you just been sitting here on your ass while the rest of the world's picking itself up and getting going again."

"Really?"

"Why you think I been on the move? I guess you never heard of the Red Queen either?"

Taggart shook his head, dumbfounded.

Peregrine danced a quick little step. "I figured as much. Well, I seen her, too. Strange little place she runs..."

"Where is it?"

"Where? Oh, you probably never heard of it. Little town down in the lowlands way south of here. But never mind about that, boy. How much farther till we get that drink?"

Taggart pointed at the tumble of wood and aluminum up ahead. "Not too far. Listen, Mr. Peregrine, how'd you survive? All that moving around and all. How'd these other people, all these you've seen, how'd they make it?"

"I don't know. Immune, I guess. Same as you, right? I don't mean to say that I ain't seen a lot of people kicked off, 'cause I have."

"Kicked off?"

Peregrine stopped, grabbed himself by the throat in a grotesque pantomime, stuck out his tongue, rolled his eyes. "You know, dead."

"Oh," said Taggart, as if he were grasping some arcane truth. This was an odd character, this Peregrine. Taggart did not know what to make of his ways yet.

"Yeah, it was them germs that turned you yellow. That stuff got out in the world. Plague. I guess us that didn't get it was just lucky."

Taggart stepped ahead and opened the door to his shelter. Looking back, he said, "I figured that. It didn't take long for everybody to die off out here." He paused and looked back at Peregrine's cart. "You have anything in there you want to bring in?"

"Naw, ain't nothing but a bunch of shit anyway," said the old man. "Besides, there ain't nobody around to bother it, right?" He threw back his head and cackled his unsettling laugh once again.

Taggart gave him a mug of water and offered him some pickled vegetables, which Peregrine accepted and spooned out with his fingers. He ate with abandon, no discernible manners, and lots of noise. "Stuff's not bad," he said finally, wiping a rivulet of juice on the edge of his ragged sleeve.

"Where'd it come from?"

"It was one of the industries we did out here. Agricultural preserves were fairly self-sufficient. We didn't really need the cities."

"How long you been out here by yourself?"

"Since I was a kid, since I was 11. My Mom died then."

"So you've been alone ever since? Nobody to talk to, just you and all this busted-up farm stuff, huh?"

*East of here there's this magical kingdom. Got all different types vying for control... The whole shebang's run by this nice old fellow. Calls himself 'the Wizard'.*

"Yes sir," said Taggart.

"This hovel here's all you got left?"

"Before I was born, they had some kind of trouble here at the preserve. People needed food. My parents and the other people that worked here—they had to fight them for it."

"And they enjoyed a pyrrhic victory, did they?"

"Huh?" said Taggart.

Peregrine snorted. "Just an old phrase. Wouldn't mean much to you. By the time the fightin' was over, everything they were fightin' for was destroyed anyway."

"I guess that's about the size of it..."

"The dummies!" said the old man. "What a bunch of beauties we were, huh?"

"So I figure it."

"What was you doing on that windmill when I came up? You like to sit up there or something?"

Taggart smiled. "No, I was putting gears on the shaft. Trying to get back some electrical power. I'm kinda good at mechanical stuff. It broke but I can probably fix it."

Peregrine laughed.

"What's so funny?" Taggart felt insulted, but didn't know why.

"Why bother with that fool thing? Why not come along with me and we'll find all the power we need?"

"Power? Where?"

"Where I'm going, of course. To...to Oz, yeah that's the ticket," he said triumphantly, waving his hand with a flourish.

"Oz? Where's that?"

"I figured you wouldn't have heard of it," said the old man with a grin. "Well, it's like this. East of here there's this magical kingdom that's got started. It's a funny little place. Got all different types vying for control and all that. Good and evil—stuff like that. The whole shebang's run by this nice old fellow. Calls himself 'the Wizard'."

Taggart had never heard of a place like that, and for the first time, he began to doubt the words of this strange old man. "I never heard of any place like that. What's a 'wizard'?"

"Haven't you heard of anything, boy? Didn't anybody ever read to you as a kid? Or tell you stories?"

"We didn't have much time for reading, sir. And we didn't have many books, either."

"I'm gettin' the picture," said Peregrine.

"So what's a wizard?"

"That's a fellow who can control all sorts of forces. A boss."

"How far east did you say this place is?"

"I didn't." Peregrine guffawed, slapping his knee.

"Well, how about telling me."

"Why, would you like to go with me?"

"Maybe," said Taggart, weighing the possibilities. It certainly was not much of a life scraping along in the ruins as he had been doing. "Does this Wizard have electricity?"

"Coming out of his ears!" cried Peregrine.

"What?"

"Just an expression. I mean, yes. He's got plenty of it."

"Oh...well, what about food? Does he have plenty of food? And music? Do they have music?"

"Sure they got food," said Peregrine. "But music? What's with the music? You like music?"

Taggart nodded. "The one thing we did have, that I remember as a little kid, was music. Even when things were bad, we had music. I'd just about give anything to hear somebody sing, to see people dance."

"Oh, yeah, I see...well, of course, the Wizard's got music. I hear that he plays the stuff all the time."

"Really?"

Peregrine nodded. "But that's not all they got. I hear that the women in Oz are the best on the whole planet!"

"Huh?"

Peregrine looked at him warily. "Yeah, you know, women. You remember what they are, don't you?"

"Oh, sure," said Taggart, sensing it was what the man wanted him to say. "It got so I used to think that maybe there wasn't anybody else alive but me."

"Well, that's not true. Believe me. How about some more of them pickled beets?"

Taggart fetched another canister, opened it, and handed it to the old man, who greedily stuffed several into his mouth.

Taggart watched him in silence for a while, trying to piece together the odd parts that made up the stranger. It was so different, so exciting in a passive sort of way, just to be talking with another human being, that their conversation had almost been secondary. But in the silence that now ensued, other than the slurping noise of the old man eating, Taggart reviewed the content of Peregrine's words more carefully. That there were others alive heartened him. That there were places where men had not only survived the plague, the Yellow Death, but were actually living constructive communal lives, rekindled a hope he'd long thought dead.

"When will you be leaving?" he asked finally, as the old man threw the canister into the fireplace, lay back in his seat against the wall, and exhaled loudly as if planning to fall asleep.

"Well, I don't exactly know. I wasn't planning to find anybody here and was just planning to stay the night and move on. But since you're so hospitable and all that, I just might be persuaded to stay on for a day or so."

"Oh, I see. But what about Oz? Didn't you say you were going to Oz?"

"That's right."

"Well how far is it from here? How long will it take you to get there?"

"Now I'm afraid you got me on that one, son. Seeing's how I never been there, I don't know. Course, I don't expect it would take more than a week, going by what I've heard."

"You've never been there? The way you were talking, I thought you'd been there before."

"No, I haven't. But I talked to a lot of people that have and they all say such wonderful things about it, that I figure I've just got to

check it out for myself."

"I see. Well if you're serious about me coming along, do you mind staying a few days until I can think about it?"

Peregrine brightened, smiled, and sat up slightly. "Why sure! I'd be glad to stay a few days. I ain't on no schedule. What's a day one way or the other, right?"

Taggart smiled and took a sip of tea. The room seemed to become warmer as he sat basking in the glow of another's presence—even an odorous, unmannerly old man like Peregrine. "All right then, Mr. Peregrine. You're welcome to everything that's here. You can sleep over there. I'll fix you up a place tonight, after supper. Right now, though, I think I want to finish that mill. Just in case I decide not to go with you, I want to have some power out here."

"Suit yourself, son. If you don't mind, I'm going to take a little snooze. It's been a long and weary road for me."

Peregrine slumped over on the floor and curled up like a scruffy old dog. Taggart smiled and washed out his mug. He banked the coals in the hearth, and returned outside to be greeted by a sky of indifference.

Later that evening, after Taggart had prepared a large meal, Peregrine went out to his cart and carried in an armful of odd things. There was a small package of cards with numbers and symbols, plus a few with pictures of men and women on them. Peregrine was able to make these cards dance between his fingers very quickly and rearrange themselves into what appeared to be random positions. From this arrangement, he performed tricks that ranged from apparent telepathic ability to obvious sleight-of-hand exercises. Peregrine also knew many kinds of amusements to play with these cards, eventually teaching Taggart the games of poker, blackjack, and tunc. They played for canisters of preserved food, and before the evening was over, Peregrine had a large mound of canisters stacked by his chair at the table.

But there were other diversions as well. Peregrine's cart was a treasure chest of pleasures from a civilization on entropy's highway. Things Taggart had never seen. There were holograms of people and places he had never seen. Exotic tobaccos, liquors, drugs, soaps, oils, essences, herbs, spices, books, tools, weapons that no longer worked, pieces of equipment that even Peregrine could not identify. All of these things, he said, were gifts from the various famous personages he claimed to have met in his travels. The fact that some of them were damaged was always explained away with some slippery story. Peregrine spoke with a smooth, fluid delivery that was almost too accommodating, too easy. It was as if the old man sometimes knew ahead of time what questions Taggart would put to him, so rapidly and thoroughly could he provide all-sustaining answers. Still, throughout the evening, Taggart remained a captive within the magical aura of another's company.

When the scrap wood in the hearth burned low and the lamps sucked the last of the oil into their wicks, Taggart was reluctant to sleep. Scarcely had he blown out the light when Taggart could hear the bellows regularity of Peregrine's snoring. It came through the darkness in rattling wheezes, soon painfully anticipated. But it was not the old man's breathing that kept Taggart awake, but more what he represented. The young man lay awake for uncounted hours, trying to order all that he had been told that day, trying to fit everything into a logical frame of reference.

Was it true that other parts of the continent still thrived and carried on the pretense, if not the business, of civilization? Then why was there no power in the subterranean cables? Why had no one come from any of the urban complexes to help rebuild the preserves? If there were people, then they would most surely need the agricultural centers to live.

But it could be as Peregrine said. That men had grouped into smaller bands, formed little principalities, little "kingdoms" as he called them. They no longer saw need for the larger urban complexes and the preserve system. Anything, Taggart concluded, was possible in a world populated by creatures as strange as men. For now, he would have to be satisfied to know that other men and other places still existed.

Even a place called Oz.

The next day, Taggart completed the gearing on the windmill and was trying to piece together a belt-drive system from cannibalized machines and children's toys. Peregrine watched this operation intently, although he offered no assistance other than verbal assurances that Taggart was doing things properly. By afternoon, the sky began to scowl at them and whirlwind ghosts began to pirouette across the plains. The dust and dirt buffeted them as they fled into Taggart's shelter like rodents burrowing into their mounds.

Taggart kept a fire going as he listened to the latest of Peregrine's tales—this one about a wondrous ship called *The Nautilus* that prowled beneath the earth's oceans, stopping every now and then to disperse favors upon the shoreline inhabitants. It seemed that the ship was commanded by a man of great compassion. Peregrine at one time had booked passage on *The Nautilus* and had sailed from one coast of North America to the other by way of a place call Tierra del Fuego.

"How come you didn't stay with Captain Nemo?" asked Taggart as Peregrine's tale finally wound to an inconclusive finish.

"Why should I? When I hadn't been to Oz yet?" said the old man with a lilt in his voice. "Everybody should see Oz at least once. The Captain even told me that. Besides, the Wizard can help people. That's the biggest reason why people want to go there. He can do just about anything."

Taggart scoffed at this last remark and Peregrine stamped a foot on the wood floor. "It's true, goddammit! Look, you just name something that you want, and I'll bet the Wizard could give it to you."

"Why would he want to give me anything?"

"Cause he's the Wizard!" sputtered Peregrine. "Cause...that's his job!" He grinned, beaming with a glow of self satisfaction.

Taggart paused, thinking of something that he might get from the Wizard. "Could he teach me to make music?" asked Taggart abruptly.

"Hell, yeah! That's no big deal."

"Really? Could I learn to play the autar?"

"Autar! Hell, you could learn to play anything. Everything! Make music all the time, you could."

Taggart sat back in his chair, gazing unseeing into the ceiling rafters. Maybe he should go with Peregrine. It felt so good to be talking again, to be trading ideas, even to argue occasionally. In Oz, there would be thousands of people to meet, to enjoy, to despise, to love. And there would be music.

"You know, I've been thinking," said Taggart, "that maybe I'll go with you. To Oz, I mean."

Peregrine sat up, his furry eyebrows suddenly knotted up tight over his small eyes.

"You will?"

"Yes, you've convinced me that there's nothing here for me. Nothing but loneliness and quiet. Nothing."

"You sure about this, son?"

"Yes, I think I am. We can leave whenever you're ready. But morning's okay with me. The storm'll have passed by then."

"Morning? Oh, sure. That'll be fine. Sure, son we can leave right

*Everywhere I been I seen them lizards scuttling around. They might be mutating, but they ain't dying. For all I know, they might be liking it, getting stronger...*

after sunup. Now, how about a little seven card stud?"

"Right now? Don't you want to talk about leaving?"

"Plenty of time for that," said Peregrine. "If we're going to be leaving this place, we may's well get in a few hands with a roof over our heads 'fore we do. He reached into his baggy jacket pocket and produced a gilt-edged deck. "Deuces wild?"

Before Taggart answered, the old man started dealing the cards.

The hours faded away like drifting smoke as they played. Neither man spoke, other than to bet his hand or exclaim upon the luck of the cards. Taggart wondered why the old man had become so strangely silent. There was a look in his black eyes that indicated Peregrine's thoughts were not on his game.

The next morning, Peregrine puttered about his cart. He had been reluctant to part with some of his trinkets, even though room was needed for some of Taggart's foodstocks, tools, and the one projectile gun that still worked. Peregrine insisted on bringing along the weapon. There were still half-crazed animals out there; some were mutations, and some were still dying from diseases. It was a lot easier to deal with the unexpected when you were protected, Peregrine had said. And so they loaded up the cart and began pulling it behind them on their trek into the east.

Within several hours they had passed the farthest boundaries of the preserve, and the blackened, blighted soil stretched out behind them like a table top. Up ahead, Taggart saw a cracked, gray ribbon intersecting their path. "That's one of the connecting arteries," he said, pointing to the deserted road.

"Where'd it go?" Peregrine shaded his eyes despite the cold gray helmet of sky above them.

"Another preserve. Eventually it cuts east to the Botaneering Complex."

"The what?"

"It was where they conducted experiments on plant life. They had succeeded in cultivating all kinds of mutations. Actually designed their own vegetables. Just like people, I hear."

"Oh, yeah. I've heard about that kind of shit. Good riddance, I say." Peregrine hacked up a mouthful of phlegm and hurled it into the wind. "Damn bastards had to fool with everything. Couldn't leave nothing be. Even the plants."

"It might be easier if we stayed on the artery," said Taggart. "It heads east pretty soon and that's the direction you want to be going in, right?"

Peregrine nodded and they headed for the road. Taggart was pulling the cart behind him and he was grateful to drag the rig up over the shoulder of the roadway, where the tires could roll smoothly. The old man seemed to be as fresh as when they had started, but Taggart was feeling pain and exhaustion in every muscle. His knees, the soles of his feet, his calves, everything seemed to be on fire. Occasionally he was forced to stop, complaining and exhausted, while Peregrine taunted him and suggested that maybe he should go back to his fruit cellar and stay there.

When they stopped at sundown, Taggart estimated they had traveled perhaps 60 keys. As he pre pared a small fire, Peregrine sat on a flat rock, playing with a two-sided disk attached to a string. The old man would whistle and sing to himself as he madethe object roll up and down the string which he had attached to his index finger.

"What's Oz look like, anyway, Mr. Peregrine?"

Peregrine snapped his finger and the "yo-yo," as he called it, jumped up into his palm. "Well, it's quite a place, son. They got these big roads running all around it and through it—kind of like that one, except that they're made of big yellow bricks."

"Really? That's odd."

"Naw. Kind of pretty, I hear. Anyway, there's castles all over the place and, of course, the Wizard's got the biggest one of all. Carnival tents and bazaars, merchants and artisans in their alfresco stands, a million smiling people crowd the big boulevards, singing and dancing, buying and selling. They have gardens that just kind of hang off the buildings, big terraces with every kind of flower in the world, statues and monuments all over the place. It's a damned wonderland, I tell you."

"How could there be any place like that?"

"What's the matter? Don't you believe me? You've believed me up till now." Peregrine's lips pushed into a pout.

"Mr. Peregrine, I didn't say I don't believe you. It's just that it's hard to see how so many people could survive the hell that went across this planet so easily. What I mean is, where'd these 'smiling people' come from? What kind of power does this Wizard have, anyway?"

Peregrine laughed. "I told you it was a kind of magic stuff. That's the thing, son. You got to believe in magic. Or it won't mean nothin' to you."

Taggart turned away from him and began poking a stick in and out of the fire. The light danced over his features, accentuating his disbelief.

"Then why'd you come with me?" said Peregrine, his lips trembling, his eyes glistening in the firelight.

"I came with you because I was so glad to be with somebody... and I guess I was afraid to be alone anymore. I came with you because I was tired of living like some animal. You came along and told me there were people all over the world living like kings. I didn't come with you because I wanted to believe in magic. Now talk sense!"

Peregrine sat just beyond the glow of the dying flames. His lips moved but no words were uttered. He mumbled to the darkness as he clenched his fists into tight knots. Slowly, his shoulders slumped, his head bowed.

Looking at him, Taggart wished he hadn't lashed out at him, crushed him like that. "I'm sorry," he said. "I guess I'm just tired. I—I haven't walked this far in a long time. I'm sore and I'm tired and I was taking it out on you, that's all. I didn't mean it. "

Peregrine did not reply at first. He sat staring into the darkness, kneading one hand into the other. "Yes, you did," he said finally. "You meant it. And I don't blame you. Sitting around all day listening to the crazy stories of a crazy old man."

Taggart stared at him, a hunched, tragic figure. "What do you mean?"

"Well," Peregrine rubbed his beard nervously. "I don't know...it's just that—Naw, I don't know what I'm saying. You got me upset, I guess."

Taggart watched the man fingering the buttons of his shirt, avoiding his gaze. He couldn't remember ever seeing someone as sad-looking as Peregrine sitting by the edge of the fire. "This is really dumb, you know," Taggart finally said. "Here we are, the only two people for probably hundreds of keys, and we're arguing with each other. Hurting each other. I don't think any of us will ever learn anything, you know that?"

Peregrine chuckled. "Yeah, that's the truth, ain't it? Look, son, I understand how you feel about this thing. You just got to take my word for it, that's all. Some things are hard to understand and you just got to take them on faith. The way I understand it, this Wizard fellow discovered a way to get by. He made it, but don't ask me how, 'cause I don't really know."

Taggart studied Peregrine's face, a mass of creases and sagging flesh, and saw the sadness, the pleading, that was there. "All right, I think I understand what you mean," he said after a short pause. "I guess I'll just have to wait till we get to Oz."

Peregrine grinned and the sadness disappeared. "That's about the size of it, son." He stood up and stared into the night sky. "We better get some sleep, don't you think? Long day again tomorrow."

Taggart agreed and they rigged a small polyurethane tent that Peregrine had cached in the cart. Within seconds of crawling inside, the old man's breathing fell into a deep rhythmic pattern and Taggart was alone with his thoughts.

He dreamt of roads of yellow bricks.

The morning arrived like an uninvited guest; the harsh, hazy light an annoyance that would not go away. Taggart struggled out of the tent to find his body cross-hatched with pain. His bones, his joints, and the muscles in his thighs, shoulders, and neck were all stiff, unyielding. Despite the sun, he felt chilled and cold and damp. Thoughts of the warm clutter of his home did little to encourage him as he started a fire and boiled water for tea.

After Peregrine arose, they ate, packed, and struck out along the artery which stretched endlessly ahead of them. The bleak barren landscape never changed—a continuous swath of cracked earth, punctuated by an occasional thorny, tangled bush, a stand of naked trees.

Rolling hills seemed to disappear as they approached them. There was a stark, wasted aspect to the land: no color, no smell, nothing. And yet, as they walked along dragging the cart, Taggart could almost sense the land did not want them there. It was as if it had suffered enough indignity, and the presence of men only intensified the bitterness.

Still they walked on, pausing only to share a cup of warm water, saving their energy by remaining silent.

By afternoon they came upon the bones of a dead animal. It had probably been a rodent of some kind, although the skull had two small horn-like projections above each eye. Taggart thought the formations might have been evidence of a new mutation in the species.

Walking only a short distance farther, they discovered another animal skeleton, bleached and picked clean of even its connecting tissue. And then another. And another. As they looked ahead, they saw that more carcasses were visible. Like little white coils of springs, the rib cages lay in a vast graveyard.

"What the hell is this?" said Taggart, pointing to grisly remnants.

"I seen this kind of thing before," said Peregrine, nodding to himself. "We're heading into some kind of bad spot. Must be off that way." He pointed to the southeast.

"Yellow?" Taggart felt uneasy at the mention of the plague.

"Yep. Any of these critters that happened to wander through this area probably picked up enough of 'the death' to knock it out quick."

"But why just the bones? What could be coming along to eat the bodies? And even if they could eat, wouldn't the flesh be contaminated so bad that they'd die anyway?"

"You'd think so, wouldn't you?" Peregrine laughed. "Funny thing, but it seems like that lizards and the insects don't seem to be bothered much by all them germs."

"You're kidding."

"No I ain't. Everywhere I been I seen them lizards scuttling around. They might be mutating some, but they ain't dying. For all I know, they might be liking it, might be getting stronger from them germs. One fella I met near the Pacific—they got lots of desert out that way, and lots of lizards—he says that maybe the reptiles are fixing to take over again. This guy thinks that maybe the meteor and the weather and the plague and shit were just the catalyst to start them growing up big and terrible again. Just like the diney-sores, you know?'

"I don't think we should go any farther in this direction," said Taggart wanly.

"Hell, no!" Peregrine laughed. He paused and studied the sky. "Besides, if my bearings are right, we should be heading north just about now, anyway."

"Really? You got any idea how much farther?"

"Not exactly. But my nose says that we're getting pretty close."

"Your nose?"

"Just an expression. I mean, I have a feeling that it's not too much farther. Maybe a day at most."

They walked for another three hours in silence, angling away from the artery and the deadly pocket it bisected. When they stopped, it was on a slight rise that overlooked a gently rolling terrain. Taggart started a fire from some scrubby bushes and wiry hedge that clung to the rough soil, while Peregrine struggled to get the lines of the bright orange tent taut and secure.

After their dinner, Taggart looked up into the now sunset sky. The stars had already started poking holes in it. "Hey, what's that?" Taggart said to the old man, who was already rolling himself up in the tent.

"What's what?"

"I'm not sure, but look out there...." Taggart pointed into the northeast. "What's that light on the horizon?"

Peregrine rose to his knees, dusting off his baggy pants. He picked up his feathered helmet, seated it firmly on his head, and stood up to study the sky.

With each passing minute the dying sun revealed more of the night, and the glow beyond the horizon grew stronger by contrast.

"It's huge! Whatever it is...!" said Taggart.

"I can remember when the whole sky used to burn like that," said Peregrine. "When the meteor first hit, I thought it would always be like that."

"Could there've been another meteor, a bomb or something?" Taggart stared at the glowing piece of sky.

"Naw, that ain't no radiation. Too intense. Too goddamned bright! Goddamn, I don't believe it myself."

"What do you mean?"

Peregrine laughed long and loudly, then giggled like a child. "That's a city! That's a city out there beyond them hills! Goddamned if it ain't Oz!"

"Really? We found it?"

"What else can it be? Come on, son. We can't camp here tonight. We got to throw all this shit in the wagon and get going!"

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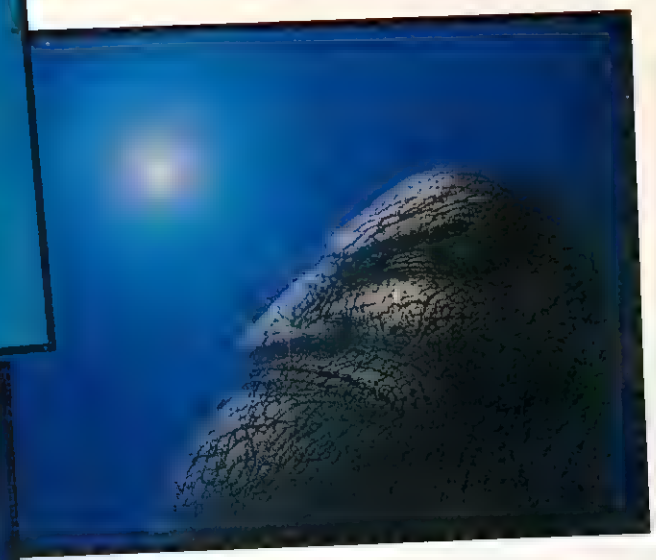

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Suddenly the pain and exhaustion were forgotten, and Taggart felt the adolescent thrill of discovery recharging him, spurring him on.

They walked as quickly as they could, in spite of the black moonless night. But the sky shimmered with the lights of Oz diffused through the atmosphere. What a grand place it must be, thought Taggart, transforming the sky itself into a beacon. He could almost hear the music in the street...

Then, without warning, Peregrine's voice cut through the night with a painful cry. "My leg! It's got my leg. Oh, God! Get it off!

Taggart dropped the tow-bar, started tearing into the canvas cover of the cart, groping desperately for the gun. In the darkness he could vaguely see Peregrine's silhouette, jack-knifed, writhing, arms flailing wildly at some unseen thing by his leg.

Something hard struck Taggart's palm. The stock of the weapon. Hard. Smooth. He pulled it from beneath a pile of junk and ran toward Peregrine, who was now on the ground screaming, moaning.

"Get the sumbitch off a me! Jesus!"

Taggart saw a long cigar-shaped thing; there was a hint of jaws and teeth, sunk into the flesh of Peregrine's calf. Taggart swung the rifle over his head and brought it down hard on the animal. There was a sound like a stick wrapped in a wet towel being snapped.

"Still holding on, son! Get him off...Awshit, get him off..."

Taggart reached down and felt a pulpy mass, scales, a bony skull and moist jaws clamped like a vise on Peregrine's leg. He pried the lower mandible back and the thing fell away from the old man' s ragged flesh.

"What is it? What was it?"

"Goddamned lizard. I don't know. They must hunt at night. Oh God, it hurts. My leg's on fire!"

"I better get some light, Mr. Peregrine. You're bleeding pretty bad."

Taggart started a small fire and examined the wound in the flickering light. The bites were not deep, but they were extensive. Taggart dressed and bandaged the leg as best he could, then stretched the old man out in the tent. The thing that had attacked him was jaws and teeth, it seemed. It had thick scales and bands of color around its body, tiny little claws and a thick tail.

Taggart made some tea, then checked on the old man. His breathing was rough and irregular, and his forehead hot as an iron, peppered with beads of perspiration. He tried to get Peregrine to sip the tea, but most of it ran down his chin into his matted beard.

"Mr. Peregrine, what's the matter with you?Can you hear me?"

"Yeah, I hear you," he said, each word clipped, forced.

"Well, what's the matter? You didn't lose that much blood."

"It ain't that, I think I got poison in me."

"What?" Taggart felt the muscles in his neck and jaws constrict.

"That damn critter must have venom. Pretty strong shit, I figure. From the way it's getting me."

"How do you feel? Can you drink this?"

"That won't help. I can feel that shit burning my lip. I ain't going to make it."

"Don't say that."

"Why not? True, ain't it?"

Taggart reached out and took the old man's hand, squeezed it tightly. Peregrine's skin was hot, but covered with a film of clammy perspiration. His breathing grew more labored, shuddered, racked him as he lay on his back. "You won't die. We're almost there. The Wizard can help you."

Peregrine tried to laugh, coughed instead, almost choking at the end of it. "Son, I know the Wizard can't help me."

"Why not?"

"'Cause there ain't no Wizard."

Taggart was confused, hurt, angered. The poison must have been very fast, very deadly. It was affecting the old man's mind. He was out of his senses. "What do you mean, no Wizard? Of course there is."

"Ain't no place called Oz, either. No *Nautilus*. No King Hamlet. or none of that crap I told you about." Peregrine looked up at him through dull eyes. Slowly the lids slid shut.

"Then what's that shining up in the sky ahead of us?" Taggart squeezed the hand again.

"I don't know, but it ain't Oz."

"How can you be so sure?" Taggart felt for a pulse and saw that it was frighteningly weak. "Come on, I'm going to carry you. We got to get help."

Peregrine tried to protest, but Taggart lifted him up and slung him across his shoulder. The old man's ridiculous-looking helmet fell and rolled away from them.

The hours dragged past and Taggart stumbled and staggered across the dark plain. Occasionally he stopped to check the old man; each time his condition was worse than before. If only he would get to the Wizard!

Another hour passed and suddenly Taggart saw something breaking the edge of the horizon. Something solid, bright and blazing. It appeared to be the uppermost edge of an arc. He increased his pace, and with each step the vision grew more substantial.

It was a shimmering hemisphere of light, energy.

Taggart gently laid the old man down. Shaking him, he spoke. "Peregrine, look, we've found it. Look! Can you open your eyes?"

Peregrine moaned something unintelligible. His eyelids fluttered open, unseeing.

"It's part of a dome or something. See it? It's Oz, Peregrine, Oz."

The light of the dome was reflected in the old man's eyes. His bushy brows twitched once, his lips trembled. "It can't be..." The voice was dry, hoarse.

"We're almost there. You're going to be all right," said Taggart, lying even to himself now.

"Leave me here," said Peregrine. "Let me die outside."

"Mr. Peregrine—"

"No!" the word was urgent, desperate. "But listen..."

Taggart waited as Peregrine struggled to finish the sentence. For a moment, he feared that he was already dead. Then Peregrine spoke again.

"...Just in case I was right, tell them...tell them that...Dorothy sent you."

Taggart leaned forward as Peregrine's eyes slid shut. "What did you say? What? Who's Dorothy?"

Peregrine exhaled once, his shoulders slumped, his jaw sagged slightly, and Taggart was immediately reminded of the grim pantomime of death the old man had once performed.

He buried the old man in the dry earth just as the sun was rising. The dawn overwhelmed the glow from the city, and if the dome still burned, it was invisible in the bright sun. Although Taggart hardly knew the man, he felt a great sadness. It seemed so unfair for him to die so soon after giving Taggart new hope, new purpose. The old man's death somehow struck him as more unjust than any of the others—perhaps even his own father's—and that made him feel worse.

He left the cart by the gravesite, untouched, unspoiled, like the pharaohs with their barges in their tombs. Whatever was left of Peregrine lay tumbled under the canvas top, and Taggart could not bring himself to disturb it.

By evening, his journey was almost at an end. Before him lay the City of Oz—there could be no doubt now—and he wished that Peregrine had lived to see such grandeur. Beyond the haze of the force-

*Before him lay the City of Oz—there could be no doubt.... Beyond the haze of the force-field, he could make out the countless spires and towers of a great city.*

field, he could make out the countless spires and towers of a great city. The buildings were interconnected at various levels by graceful ramps, seemingly unsupported. The complexity of the architecture and the forced beauty overwhelmed him. And everywhere there was light and implied motion.

The closer he came to the outermost edges of the City, the more evidence he saw of what looked like a terrible battle that must have been fought here. The ground was ragged and scorched, covered with the pitted hulks of half-disintegrated fighting machines, and an occasional skeleton, half buried in the windblown dust and debris. There were craters and troughs, torn up by the final descents of fiery aircraft. The scene reached up to the very edge of the force-field itself.

Still Taggart pressed forward, not wanting to pause for either food or rest. So close now, he thought. So close. Except for the wind, whispering among the wreckage all about him, there was no sound. No music, he thought oddly. As he drew closer, he had the sensation of being watched, not by any particular person or thing, but rather by the city itself. It sat before him like a great faceless creature, and abruptly Taggart felt uneasy, almost threatened, for the first time since coming to this place. It was not so much the lingering smell of death about the place—for he had grown accustomed to death—but rather the odd quiet, sterile brightness of the city before him.

Something moved at the extreme limits of his peripheral vision.

Snapping his head to the left, he sought it out, but saw nothing. Then there came a sound. A clanking. Metal upon metal. Taggart wished now that he had violated Peregrine's possessions, that he had brought along the gun.

There was movement again. A flash of white light and heat.

And darkness.

He awoke in a small room, strapped to a flat-cushioned platform. A bank of instruments half covered one of the white walls. There was a man of indeterminate age standing over him. He was totally bald, and did not even have eyebrows. His skin was pink and smooth like a baby's, and he had a small pointy nose, blue eyes, and a tiny mouth. He wore a set of headphones that appeared to be implanted in the flesh that covered his skull.

"Who are you?" said Taggart, struggling against the restraints. "I am Pell," said the man, apparently not disposed to give additional information unless asked.

"What happened to me? Why am I being tied down like this?"

"I am told that you were captured outside Chicago. An intruder."

"Chicago? This isn't...Oz?"

"Oz? What is an Oz?" said Pell, turning to adjust several of the instruments.

"Never mind," said Taggart, thinking immediately of what Peregrine had tried to tell him. Thinking of what he now suspected to be the fantasies of an old man who had seen so much terror that he had dealt with it in the only way he could. "What're you going to do with me?"

Pell turned and stared at him blankly, coldly. "You show a high degree of development. You will be used."

"Used? What're you going to do to me?" Taggart jerked his wrists against the mesh bonds. "Who's in charge of this place? I want to talk to someone in charge!"

"That is impossible. Chicago is engaged in many activities. It already knows of your existence. That is enough."

"Chicago? What do you mean? I want to talk to...to the Boss. Do you understand?"

"Do you understand?" said Pell. "Chicago is. That is all."

Taggart understood. The city had become that indefinable essence, an almost alchemical happening that men had strived to create. It hadn't been successfully achieved before the Impact and the Yellow Death, at least Taggart had not known of it.

But something had happened here. Here in the Chicago Cityplex, where all the databases and independent control systems had achieved that merged state of function, that moment of cybernetic Darwinism when sentience became the next logical step, the next choice.

"What is Chicago going to do with me?"

Pell looked at him. "The City must be maintained."

"I don't understand."

"You need not. Accept the fate chosen for you. And be strong."

A door opened and two other men entered, nearly identical to the one called Pell. Taggart began screaming, letting all the fear, the hate, grief, and pain blend into one tortured cry that did not stop even as they wheeled him out of the room and down a corridor from which he would not return.

After a time, he did not know how long since he no longer thought in such terms, he was crunching across the wasted landscape, flexing his limbs, his weapons systems. His new body performed beautifully during the tests. He was a seamless shell of armor, many centimeters thick, bristling with sensors and inputs that rushed information to the colloidal braincase at the speed of light. His treads churned up the dry soil, and the delicate but strong suspension system absorbed every movement, every jerk and jolt. Deep in the center of his body the machines pumped and paused, the machines that kept his brain full of nutrients and oxygenated blood. He was happy.

But every now and then, an odd thought, an image sometimes, a concept or a word at other times—would come to him. And he would struggle with it, trying to remember something, but never actually succeeding.

Outside the City, where Taggart roamed, the soil turned to dust and the rocks to sand and a great desert rose up to cover the markers and the dead things.

And he never found out about Dorothy. □

Henry Martin Ruthven, self-proclaimed hack writer,
sought the meaning of life in science fiction.
What he found instead, he feared, was the meaning of death.

# THE PASSAGE OF THE LIGHT

BY BARRY N. MALZBERG

*Illustration by Janet Aulisio*

AT THE EATON CONFERENCE IN 1993, SITTING ON a panel having to do with postmodernism—or perhaps it is the archetypal hero in history and science fiction—Ruthven has an insight. Perhaps it is not an insight but an emotion disguised as reason, mocking in this shielded form his delusion that he has at last understood himself. It is not so much the debauchery of the field of science fiction, now combined with fantasy and known in places like these as "fabulation", as decadence which has done matters in. With all of their yearnings, twitches, quick and slow poisonous entanglements on the beds of a thousand conventions, with all of their alcoholism, narcissism, cowardice and greed, his colleagues were able in the old days to separate to their satisfaction the three-cents-a-word labors and the more riotous and disgraceful entanglements which truly kept them going; now however, with the embrace of the fantastic and the outskirts of academia slowly enfolding science fiction, it seems at last to have departed—along with his remaining colleagues and their successors who have wandered through various doors—any conviction that from these small and terrible constructions might come some real portrait of the world which had caused them all such discomfort. Now it is the emolument or the performing rights which are all.

Ruthven thinks of this and other things, feeling—as he tends to feel increasingly in these public moments—a kind of disconnection so strong that it might be remorse: remorse for his 67 years, for the passage of the light, for the expunging of his own time and desire on the ramshackle surgical tables of deconstruction or anomie. It is all too much for him, along with almost everything else, and he has the good sense to remain quiet, to let matters drift around him, to let the poet, the professor, the mainstream fantabulator discuss the deconstruction or reaffirmation of the fairy tale within the post-technological context while, dreaming in the soft and radiant slants of the California sun, come late to his circumstance but beckoning him to ignore or depart earlier constraints, Ruthven thinks of women outside of his marriage whom he has embraced, old griefs bedazzled and recollected in this remorseless academic cubicle, the wounded and bleak fire of the adulterer's orgasms with which in the old days he was able to stretch weekends of this sort into the stuff of recollection which could hold him in place through the summers and winters of his marriage to follow, all of those seasons of his marriage and of his twitching, inconsequential career which nonetheless had brought him to California toward the end of his life to stare at the blonde moderator, a professor of women's studies, and try to place the college sophomore from Erie, Pennsylvania whom he had met in Boston in 1980 to whom she bore some fragrant resemblance. The sophomore from Erie, Pennsylvania had shown the 54-year-old Boskone special guest Henry Martin Ruthven all the way home, and poised upon thoughts of decadence and loss as he might have been, Ruthven could remember the thrall of his entrance, long-delayed but triumphant in its spill, far better than he could any of the statements or conclusions of this panel of some 45 minutes duration.

Later, at the reception after the first complete day of the conference, one which has invited the widowed Ruthven, all expenses plus a $150 honorarium, to offer his own remembrances and recollection of 1950s fabulation as part of an early post-millennial survey of fabulation, Ruthven has been backed against an open window on this first floor by the blonde moderator, who in close-up and in the extremity of Ruthven's regret, now looks less like the college sophomore and more like a blunter and more achieved version of his late wife, Sandra. "You had very little to say this afternoon," the moderator says. Ruthven has never troubled to retain her name. "I wonder if you found the topic unacceptable or whether we were just running on a bit. I know that there was a clear concept of heroism in your *Sorcerer* series so you've obviously thought about the issue."

"No," Ruthven says, "No, I haven't thought of the issue. I don't think of anything these days much, it's easier that way. In fact," he says, "I'm really a rather superficial person. Writing for the cent-a-word markets in your developing years will do that to you if you're not careful, and then if you get locked into formulaic writing, it becomes even grimmer. I'm 67 years old. It's too late for further insights, I think." And too early for death, he would add, at least in my case, at least this is what he would have added if a certain keen and absent horror had not drifted into the otherwise obtuse features of madame chairman and had not acted to propel her toward the far wall, shaking her head and waving her glass at him. He has this effect upon many people and never more so than when he is trying not to offend, when he is working in a deliberate fashion to repress the very real loathing which comes over him at any time that science fiction or fantasy or fabulation are approached in a manner which would define. But the light, what there is of it at dusk in this small and compressed place, is soft and radiant, and his sense of remorse is not so great that he cannot appreciate the strange and devious nature of his own life as it has led him so belatedly to this, and he cannot question as well the received material of inference in this room: it might have been possible for him even 10 years ago to have found someone with whom to spend the night. Now, in his final years, surmounting the poisons of his own history and the small and utter damages which he takes fabulation to have accomplished, Ruthven is able to draw some sustenance from that inference even as he knows with a less tentative force that he will spend this night

alone, he will spend many nights alone, he is as likely to spend every remaining night of his life alone as his books and his contribution to the sport of alternative are likely to slide from all consideration within 10 years of his death. Anya Seton, Otis Adelbert Kline, Oscar Friend, Ray Cummings. Ed Earl Repp. Harl Vincent, the pseudonym for Harl Vincent Schopeflin, prolific contributor to *Astounding Stories* until Campbell had discharged Nat Schachtman, Vincent and quite a few others in a stern and final decree whose insistence—real people, real situations, a real future founded upon an enclosed and apprehended past—Ruthven can feel in the soles of his feet at the present time. The golden alien bird, drifting and singing in the cage of the Snow Maiden, its throat cruelly torn open by the Star Beast, by the products of the Weapon Shops of Isher.

**"I'm 67 years old. It's too late for further insights, I think." And too early for death...**

RUTHVEN HAD ACHIEVED A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF NOTORIety—fame was never a word which could be used within fabulation, it was grandiose in a field of grandiosity and, therefore never meant anything at all: fame for the damaged Ruthven would be the means of access to the absence of pain and he simply did not comprehend such a thing in his life, any more than he could comprehend the true, transubstantive nature of prayer—for his guest of honor speech at the Cincinnati Convention in 1983. At this convention (which Ruthven had not at that time had the wit to think of as SinCon, and now that he did have that wit, he simply did not have the means or the audience), Ruthven had started that guest of honor speech as a reading of a transcribed satirical jaunt through the trivial and mean-spirited history of the field; he had meant it as renunciation but had somehow, caught up with self-importance or the thrust of a memory of the night he had spent with the Boston schoolteacher just before, come off the page to deliver a prayer in praise and loss of science fiction, breaking down at the end, crying sickeningly into an open microphone while the chairman hovered and at last came mercifully forward to lead Ruthven to the side under the attention of 3,000 people, most of whom had no understanding of what had happened. Ruthven's final words had been printed in *Locus* and *Science Fiction Chronicle* and—in debased form—in his hometown newspaper. They had been used in a story falsifying his career and true nature which had been used in an author collection (no magazine would have printed it) and which had become moderately famous within the field, not that Ruthven read or tried to keep up with such matters or gave a damn what ill-use had been made of his truths; ill-use had been made of him all his life. Nonetheless, the speech and its pathetic close had marked him in the dungeons and secret caverns of the field from which lasting perceptions eventually congealed as an emotional and sentimental man, something of a panderer, not only the author of the *Sorcerer* series, which had become the basis of three bad films, a series of graphic novels and multitudinous foreign editions, but a writer filled at last with that very kind of self-importance and sentimentality which he had always disdained. No Hydra Club for Ruthven or sentimental essays on the pulp days for *Science Fiction Review*, he had stood away from all of that and the academicization of the genre as well, and yet in his prolix and unwinding years he had become a symbol after all, a kind of Tristan of the penny-a-worders, a man who had confessed to 3,000 friends and strangers that he had died for love of that which he had not known was his. It is for this reason that the invitations to places like Eaton have been coming in through the latter decade. Ruthven could be counted upon to give something of a show and remind the audience—juxtaposed against the kids with their large advances and open-ended series, the academicians with their mingling of contempt and fear, the writers of his time or just before who reacted to the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* years like oxen led past the slaughterhouse and into an alfalfa field, the sound of the machinery around them at all times but their own lives seemingly deknived—that there was more to science fiction than the suburbs and high-rise cooperatives of fantasy and fabulation, that in its keenest and deadliest spaces science fiction seemed capable of bringing to bear the desirous, yearning adolescent child in ways which most other pursuits could not.

Ruthven had taken the invitations—he needed in the first five years of this last decade to get away from the house in a justified way more than ever before—but he had not given good weight; he had always felt shame over his public breakdown, and while he accepted the invitations and certainly never denied what he came to think of as his disgrace, he was not interested in repeating it; one did that kind of thing once in a lifetime or perhaps three or four if one carefully scattered the residue, but one simply did not do much of this, because pandering soon enough would freeze into self-replication and performance, and performance would sink into expectations of design; he would become in these last years when he found it impossible to produce more than a novel a year or to write more than three pages a day or to produce more than 200 words at a single burst of work only a performer and a consumer of his own perceived persona. That would make him emblematic of science fiction, he supposed, a further example in microcosm of a field whose origination as a genre in the United States had been virtually synchronous with his own birth on 4/12/26, but he had never aspired to that, had not aspired to emblems of any sort, had tried to live his life in cunning and caution and an absence of pain until at last in his 40s, the restraints had become too difficult—"fuck only at conventions and then always go home" had been the advice of a colleague when the yearnings of his 40s had so overtaken him as to leave him weak, gasping and vulnerable at the sight of a single Botticelli passing him in the streets or a shuddering recollection of one or another love object of his college years presented in the speed and dwindling of night—and his life had become calamitous, insupportable and intolerably vague only long enough for Ruthven to understand that he could no longer abide this way, not on such pain and less than $15,000 a year, and it had been about that time that the commercialization of the *Sorcerer*, the night drives to the state border and the serious drinking had begun, been exacerbated and finally had eased, leaving him drained if not quite resigned when he had crawled past his 50th, then his 55th birthday (the guest of honor breakdown had changed little) and finally into his 60s, the expansion of science fiction into fantasy, film, television and common obsession somehow running contrapuntally to what seemed to be the implosion of his own perspective. Film and the academicians, the fans and the furies seemed to see more: aliens, dinosaurs, stegosaurs, elves, wolves, magic rings, witches, devils, disciples, quests and rings and things and wings, but he, Ruthven, had always seen less; his focus dwindled so that all he knew were the small convolutions of his own *Sorcerer* books, which seemed at all odds to be holding their place in the market, and the deadlier implosion of his marriage, which with Sandra's ovarian cancer and the ongoing operations which had carried her through another three years and an extended, unpleasant death, had seemed to become a replica of itself, ever, endless replication of its own dysfunction and ruined desire holding the former world convention guest of honor ever more desperately in place—one could not leave a sick and dying wife any more than one could leave the field of science fiction to be anything else. Sandra sickened and sickened and eventually died, his age, 64 years old in 1990, the last months so striated and rending that he was able, eventually, to recall none of them.

She had died in pain and great purity, the cancer stripping the years and the desperation, the recrimination and the hurt from her

even as it had taken her bones and pancreas; at the end, lying in his arms, shuddering against him with small cries reminiscent of the way he had held her in the early years of their marriage, she had become somehow the woman he had loved and she was this because she could love no more nor he nor they nor all of the dreams and disengaged portions of the heart. She had died quietly at the end and with the small, sighing release of a bird's breath, her spirit coming out against his cheek in that last exhalation, and speechless he had gone through the rest of it and three months later the death of the older daughter in an automobile accident without further emotion. He had felt through that period that surely he had become a sociopath in his endless coping mechanisms, and that the interior had been taken from him along with the last of his hair and possibility, but in the long, wracking nights to follow after the anesthesia of mourning, he had found that he was not a sociopath at all but some simulacrum of his earlier self, some disparate and shallower version of the intense young man who had read Simak and Sturgeon, had desperately wanted to reproduce that material for some kind of self-definition and more of that. He had staggered through the year of inconstant and grievous pain while paying as little attention as possible and ignoring the attempts of his younger daughter to establish some kind of bridging connection, and then he had found himself at the end of this to be another version of himself, reduced and tentative, at the edge of frailty but nonetheless recognizable, just as dying Sandra in her last breaths had been recognizably the Sandra who had cried his name and arced with him in 1955 and 1956, calling, calling him home.

***...he knows far more of the dead than of the living when he thinks of passion and influence.***

Called home again, then, called to the strange and lustrous California heat and moisture, Ruthven excuses himself from the reception and walks alone, holding a glass, on the antique and cobbled path of the college, looking at the foliage and thinking of the interstices of a business which had taken him to California and his readers to further places than that and yet which—he had to see this in his own case if not as a generality—had taught him absolutely nothing, had left him only this drained and bleaker version of the original self. While the *Sorcerer* had soared into extrapolation and interchangeability, his own spirit had shrivelled; perhaps while science fiction itself had probed this or that corridor of possibility, it had neglected to keep itself properly embedded in the earth and had therefore utterly fragmented into this clawing and disparate animal which allowed the academics to count its toes, its appendages, and its teeth, without ever quite understanding its origin or the nature of its behavior.

Or perhaps not. Perhaps none of this held any water at all; he does not know, as strange to himself in these radiant and sinking days as his interior in childhood had been to his parents. Ruthven understands that he has lost any real sense of consequence or causality in his life, that events once seemingly linked and propelled by some constant of consequence had become disconnected, that all seemed to be outcome without trigger, the cusp of his life decanted with no trace remaining. Once his life had seemed wholly explicable in terms of science fiction, most of them felt that way, that science fiction for its practitioners was the world, that fans were slans, that the possibility shack was the probability shack, that the bomb and the astronauts had made all of their speculations justifiable, inevitable. That had been a time, somewhere in the two decades after Hiroshima, when science fiction had seemed the simulcrum, but the politicization of the space program and the infusion of Tolkien into the very heart of science fiction had changed all of that: elves and dragons and flat, dead voices from space talking to Mission Control in scatology-free, highly edited language had leached from Ruthven at least any conviction that the world was responsive to what he had done. It had all become garbage to him in those bitter and enclosed 40s, the period of his unwritten book *The Lies of Science Fiction* and his frenetic but never pointless adultery had all become some kind of a monstrous anecdote rigged against him, and then with *Star Wars* and the fantastic overwhelming most of what he thought of as the stark and bitter simplicity of science fiction, everything but his income and his own ability to work had seemed to lurch out of control. Where had the academicians been in the 1950s when stroke by stroke the field had managed to redefine itself, where were the elves and the dragons when all through the 1950s the lights of the country had seemed extinguished by the brighter dazzle of television, the duller impressions of bureaucracy, and commie-hunting operatives? Where were any of them? They had come in too late for Ruthven, Sturgeon, Kornbluth or Merrill, even though they had been well early enough for *Alien III* and *Mork and Mindy*, even though Merrill and Kornbluth would not have known what to have done with these situations even if presented. All was radiant and simple on the way in, dark and impassable when you sought your way out; for the life of him, and it had been a fairly long life, the widowed Ruthven could not say how he had come to this condition or what any of it meant. Looking at the hills, looking at the ground, walking through the campus abandoned by the season, Ruthven had the intimation that not only his life but his very condition, the very circumstances which had framed him had been stripped away, that he was left in this 68th year of his life wandering the campus, as a wound surrounded by murmurous and damaged flesh, regret and remorse barely disguised by respiration, angel of the spaceways swaddled as series author. A millennial preconception, perhaps, of which there was much in these times but none the less true for any of this. The ancient and wizened, the needful and the blood-marked genitals below, the harness of regret above, cinched like a beast to his history, Ruthven patrolled the borders not so much of circumstance and memory as his own insufficiency and realized that there were no conclusions whatsoever, none, that what had been done had come from instance and synchronicity to some kind of latter possibility but none of it at all through the efforts or hypocrisies of those who had perpetrated that which had overtaken them all.

Sturgeon, Bester, Heinlein, Asimov, Wilson, Kuttner, Clifton, Hamilton, Nourse, Kornbluth, Shaara, Campbell, and Ruthven could (but would not) go on and on; he understands that his is the legacy of chronology, he knows far more of the dead than of the living when he thinks of passion and influence. Most of the people whom he has known and loved are dead and still; in thrall, alive, Ruthven cannot recommit himself to that great extinguishing hammer which in the nights and days of the lost decades had so enticed him.

RUTHVEN GOES TO BED WITH THE BLONDE MODERATOR; HE connects with her after the drinks and the dinner and the speeches and the plaques on the last night of the conference; it is as easy, perhaps unavoidable, as any of these things had been for him in his 40s. No simulation or copy of Sandra, not Sandra herself had ever gripped him more explicitly nor conjoined more cunningly than the professor of women's studies, and rising bleakly, restored to himself if only for the few apocalyptic final seconds of his fleeting shudder, Ruthven sees the great bird of desire heightened in the night, reaches with a gasp, feels the fire, takes the fire, falls across the woman into the stuporous and entangling final bed which subsumes him. He sees, sinking, once again, the light against the light, the light that falls forever. He hears the sound of the great timpani. He vaults the universes and he seeks, at last and at point ultimate, like all of his brethren, to begin. To begin in the light that falls forever □

The human race likes to think that every day in every way we're getting better and better. But it could very well be that for ages, we've been heading in quite the opposite direction.

# ERUPTION

BY HARLAN ELLISON

*Illustration by Jacek Yerka*

"THERE DIDN'T USED TO BE JUST ONE MOON UP there," said very possibly the oldest and wisest human being on the weary, lined, wen-laden face of the earth. "The one we call The Moon, that one was up there, just like today; but there were seven others. Eight, all told. Back then."

De Beriot, who claimed indirect but unarguable lineal descent from Marco Polo (also Joe Louis and Prince Siddhartha, known as the Gautama Buddha, The Enlightened One), heaped more sesame noodle and crispy tangerine beef onto his plate, and looked at the old woman, whose wrinkles were so many, and so close together, that her face resembled a percale sheet taken directly from the dryer and as yet unironed. "Say *what*?" he mumbled around a mouthful of Hunan cuisine.

"Eight moons. The one we call The Moon, and seven others we called Happy, Sleepy, Dopey, Sneezy, Grumpy, Sacco and Vanzetti. All but the Moon were vaporized when Sodom, Gomorrah, and Yondok-Barron went up. Beat the hell, also, I must say, out of what was left of Gondwanaland. Killed off the last few remaining hippogriffs. Damned shame. A little cranky, a little snappish, kind of a meanspirited beast; but never been a better for deep sea hunting. Damned shame."

De Beriot speared a pot-sticker with his fork—he refused to learn how to use chopsticks—swirled it in the plum sauce, and shoved it into his left cheek, as if waiting for the change of seasons, the onset of the cold, to eat it. Slurringly, he said: "Yondok-Barron?"

The ancient wise woman scratched at her chin, nodded.

"Sodom, I know," De Beriot said. "Gomorrah, I've heard of. Never Yondok-Barron."

He looked at her with cynical superciliousness.

"All three of them went *boom*, same night," she said. "Just bad luck, I suppose—posterity-wise—that Yondok-Barron never got the press accorded Sodom and Gomorrah. Much more interesting town, actually. Built up and down the slope of a giant dormant revolving volcano. Magnificent city. Rose tier upon tier, lit like a Kafka Day Memorial Candle Chandelier, beautiful beyond the telling. Light streamed up from the interior, and all those condo lights flicking on and on and off and off, up and down the outer slope. Take your breath away. Require a pulmotor to bring you back. Stunning.

"Night it went up, you could see what you could see across the Serpentine Sea and see the seaside scenery of Sodom, ablaze on the horizon. See? But no sooner had Sodom settled to smoldering ashes, than Yondok-Barron demolished itself. Great loss."

"And the other seven moons were vaporized," said De Beriot around a shrimp puff. Clearly, he didn't believe a word of it.

"Poof!" the wisest, and very likely oldest by far, woman who had ever lived, said. She made no effort to convince, merely stated what she knew to be the truth.

Harlan Ellison has never been one to settle for ordinary when the extraordinary is possible. Ellison, asked by Morpheus International to write an introduction for the collected art of surrealist Jacek Yerka, has instead written a short story for each of Yerka's paintings. To be published in *MindFields*, due out this fall, here is but 1/30th of a much larger artistic canvas.

"Poof indeed!" De Beriot said. It was a *poof* of smart mouth dismissal. "And why such a great loss?"

"Well, you *know* what we lost when Sodom and Gomorrah exploded, I presume?" said the old, withered, avuncular wise woman. "I presume."

"No, tell me," said De Beriot. "I'm paying here, so I might as well get a bit of chat out of it."

"Well, Gomorrah was the lone repository of all the extinct human characteristics," she said. "I thought you *knew* that! When Gomorrah died, so did indestultory, klepnis, olononism, brustilology, hasper, jil, and even qwistling. Not a trace of any one of those traits—and hundreds of others—in any human being on the planet today... and I think you see what a sad pass *that's* brought us to. Read a newspaper. Listen to a radio roundup of the day's events. Be a great deal different, had even a scintilla of mneastasis survived.

"Sodom, well, Sodom was the center of alternate sexual activities. Not just the salt-oriented variations, but the much-vaunted lost three hundred and fifty-five positions, the knowledge of how to use the toe properly, eye-contact orgasm, the voice commands... well, *all* of it! Poof! Left us with nothing but a few apertures and quite a bit of messy fluids. Great loss."

De Beriot stared at her in amazement. "And Yondok-Barron? What great loss did we sustain when the volcano-imbedded city of light erupted?"

"You have no idea, do you?" the old woman said, looking at him with infinite sadness.

"None," De Beriot replied, wiping his mouth on a cloth napkin.

"Well," the old woman said, letting the robin's-egg-blue eye in the center of her forehead blink, "if you can't remember, why worry about it?"

But her smile, and the look in her eyes, was one of infinite sadness for the crippled creatures among whom she moved. □

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JK

Stranded on Earth, Rain's shape-shifting abilities allowed the alien to survive. But there was one thing the Thorbian feared would never change...

# AMONG YOU

BY PHYLLIS GOTLIEB

*Illustration by Jeff Potter*

RAIN WAKES IN SEMIFORM as always, rising out of oceanic twilight and sharpening his senses. Above him is a skylight, the color of dark water. He stretches his arm, opens his fingers for the keypad and touches it. The dome depolarizes and the room fills with blue morning light, like a well.

It is rare now that he lets himself relax into trueform. He has never lived on his own world and has never known more than three or four of its people, his siblings. He recalls flashes of green in the skies he dreams of, and jagged white, yellow or gray growths that surge upward at sunrise and fall blackened toward night, and he dreams of himself in his true form among them. But there is no way to live in that shape on this world.

Rain gets off the bed and straightens the covers that are barely rippled, then goes to the bath unit, where he washes his skin gently with froth and sprays it with a fresh coat of dermfix. So he can bear to put on the shirt and pants and those ugly shoes.

He stands with eyes closed and slowly reshapes the cartilage of his night face, his lax body, into his daily image, but he does not look at himself in the mirror until he has put on the wig and eyelashes. They are both fine-textured and an inconspicuous dark blond. He studies himself there for a moment, decides that his nose is too pointed and broadens it a bit, then colors his lips a very pale pink. He appears much the same as he did the day before, and the years before that. He snaps a holo of his head and graphs it against the standard in the 3-D plotter. It matches well enough, and is different enough to keep him from freezing into that one shape, to let him keep earning his living.

He takes his breakfast, a jug of cloudy liquid, out of the cooler set in the wall beside the bed and drains three mugfuls. "Ambrosia," he says, and snickers, because he seldom jokes, even to himself. A firm called FLUX delivers it three times a week.

The door of his bed-sitter leads to his studio. There are more electronics, holos and screens, a deck with pads, rollers, dials, lightpens. He taps a screen and finds his three appointments listed. Business nowhere as good as those early years. A chime sounds and he flicks the screen again. It flares to show a middle-aged woman coming into his foyer and sitting down, gloved hands folded on the bag in her lap. He feels *déjà vu* for the thousandth time. She looks as she did on the viewcomm when she called. Debora Pivnick, one more in a long line of Deboras and Pivnicks. She is very plain and has mixed gray hair.

He pushes a button to call up the file she's given him. Husband Albert, another in the line. He is dead seven years; Rain hasn't had to do much aging on Albert's holo, or work very hard replicating Albert. He presses one more button and the door to the foyer slides open.

He calls, "Come on in, Mrs. Pivnick," and she appears in the doorway, gripping her bag with both hands, her mouth pinched so that her smidgen of lipstick becomes a red dot.

"Albert?" she says doubtfully.

"You'll see him in a little while. My name is Rain." He offers his hand. She touches it without clasping. "I thought it would be Albert."

"No, I can't do a sim-form before I can be assured my client knows it's an assumed identity. It's a safety precaution." In case Albert's been banging some woman whose husband likes to carry a gun. He only narrowly escaped that one. "Would you like to take off your coat?"

"No thanks, I'll keep it on...it's cool here, you know."

"Yes. I find it more comfortable to work in." He says carefully, "Did you have something in particular you wanted to discuss with Albert, Mrs. Pivnick?"

"I want to know why he left me."

"Your husband is dead. I can't tell you why he died."

"He died after he left me. He didn't have to—" She cuts herself off. "Never mind. I want to see him, I just want to see him."

He knows all of it, really. But she's paying. "Are the colors in the hologram accurate?"

"Yes, as far as I can remember."

"His hair would be grayer now, I think."

"No! I want to see him just the way he was in that holo picture."

"All right. I have to prepare myself and I'll be back with you in just a few minutes."

"I thought you'd just—be him."

"I could do that, Mrs. Pivnick, be all of him, if I had to, but it's hard work and I wouldn't be able to do anything else all day. So I use wigs and clothes to help me—and you."

"Uh—I guess I understand."

"You'll see him in a few minutes."

"He used to call me Deb."

"Yes."

She pushes herself. "I got pretty tired of your tricks after all those years, and then Lily and Jake moved away, and Buck got sick and you wouldn't look at him. All that happened when you left was that I got a full-time job so I could get him into a hospice," her eyes flick at and away from him, "but when they found you rammed up a street pole with that hooker in the car—everybody started to laugh at me, you know, people next door and down the street...or I

**Arms, legs, heads and hooves leap out at him, the faces become tusks; eyes become mouths, spitting stars and**

He has seen the camcorder film record, he knows how Albert walked and talked, and for a long time he's had in his wardrobe the gray-templed wigs of all the other Alberts, their dark suits with shiny seats, their thick black shoes and the loud ties with the soup spots. He takes a little longer than necessary to push down the height and thicken the waist. He hates poor Albert.

HE REAPPEARS FROM BEHIND THE SHUTTERED SCREEN of his work-cubicle, comes up to her and stands there, hands in pants pockets rattling change as Albert had done. "Hullo, Deb. Here I am."

She raises her hand to her mouth. "Oh my God, Albert." Shaking her head in wonder, just a fraction. "You are Albert." She doesn't try to touch him. He stands waiting and she keeps staring at him until something desperate grows in her eyes.

Rain waits. His Albert has no clues. He says finally, "Well, Deb, you must have wanted to say something to me after seven years."

Tears gather on her eyelids. She whimpers once, swallows and says, "I can't! I can't!" She finds a handkerchief and wipes her eyes.

He relaxes just slightly, into a neutral face. "What am I doing wrong, Mrs. Pivnick?"

"You aren't doing anything wrong! It's just I—"

"Have you never had sim-therapy before? With Thorbian World practitioners like me?"

"I've had it three times! One was too young and didn't know how, another one didn't care how he did it, and the last one wasn't one of your people, just some old actor who used to do impressions on the TV." She blew her nose. "They couldn't make me believe at all, but you—you're really Albert, and I can't—" The tears gathered again.

"Too good?" He's never been accused of that before.

"It's not your fault, I don't want my money back or anything, I haven't got any complaints, I just won't ever try it again, that's all. I should never have come. My children think I'm crazy wanting to see him again." She wipes her tears and blows her nose one last time.

"What did you really want to say?" he asks hesitantly, not to open up a can of worms. He's had one in his own history. Can of worms, definition: ship from Thorb full of Thorbian embryos; message: HELP! Save our children! Last desperate hope! Silence. From 17 known extrasolar worlds, four or five incoherent signals, no message but one, and nothing ever heard from that world again....Albert had been silent, had sent no messages, he guesses.

She shakes her head.

Carefully he shifts back into the form. "I know I never got in touch with you, De...."

She lifts her hand, palm out, to say no, or nothing.

"And I haven't very much of an excuse for—"

She opens her mouth with a little stuttering sound and slips into the track, almost in spite of herself. "I never wanted to hear all that much from you, Allie." Tasting these first words as she speaks them. thought they did, you know, it was like eating away inside me like termites in a wooden timber." The echo of her shrill voice hangs suspended.

She swallows. "I stayed a while in a hospital—Buck was dead by then—and somehow I got my mind back, and I can see straight, or nearly. But sometimes I think I just want to yell at you, that's all, for all the good it would do."

She looks straight at him and he speaks quietly, "I guess I haven't got much to say to that, Deb." She begins to stiffen and he goes on without missing a beat, "You know I've never been an apologizer, but I wouldn't ever have wished any of that on you."

"That's true enough." She looks away for a moment and licks her lips, and as she glances back at him he is already fading away from Albert into Rain, taking the wig off, rising up into his thin shape so that his clothes hang, to keep her away from the level of anger where she would be trapped.

"You see," he says, holding up the pants to keep them from dropping, letting himself look a little ridiculous to help her down.

But she is already spent. "You must think I'm awful."

"No, no, Mrs. Pivnick." Just human. But he can't say that or she will start looking at him strangely. "You only wanted him to listen."

"I wanted more than that," she mutters. "But I guess I got to say a few things," she says, and smiles faintly.

"You can come again, you know. Second sessions are cheaper."

"I don't think I want to see Albert again. Not for a long while."

ON TUESDAYS AT NOON RAIN GOES TO SEE AN OLD MAN named Beveridge, who lives in an upscale seniors' home, one of several that pays Thorbians a little money to imitate loved ones lost many years back. For Beveridge, Rain becomes Berenice, the daughter who ran off with a married accountant 35 years ago. In this case it is important that Rain appear right away as this remembered daughter, and he does not mind walking down the malls as Berenice, a cheerful red-cheeked girl with bright eyes and mouth and a smooth helmet of dark brown hair.

Berenice always takes one of the old man's trembling hands while the nurse removes his lunch tray and says, "Hello, Dad."

"Berenice! You came back! Oh, Berenice, girl, you got to forgive me for cursing you like that, I didn't mean it! Say you forgive me!"

"Of course I forgive you, Dad! I never took it to heart!"

"You always were a good girl, Berenice." And he drifts into his afternoon sleep.

This day the door to the old man's room does not open, and the message plate in its panel flares with a sexless holo face that says, "Report to Secretary 3. Mrs. Hustring."

He pushes button 3 on the panel and Mrs. Hustring's face flicks on in seven colors.

"OH BERENI—I MEAN MR. RAIN, DIDN'T WE CALL YOU? MR. BEV-

eridge passed away last Thursday, poor old man. So we won't be needing you for him anymore, though we may call you later. Of course we'll be glad to pay you for your trouble today—unless you'd prefer to donate the money to keep services like yours alive."

"I think Dad would have wanted me to have the money," Berenice says.

He's wearing a trouser suit and turtleneck, so it's only a matter of finding a washroom, carefully wiping off the makeup, flipping wigs and doing a quick refinish on his face. He pulls off one earring and packs Berenice away forever.

Too quick a cure of Mrs. Pivnick and now out of another job. But that's how they come, like any kind of acting. He has never believed he could sustain an actor's part, every word and movement almost the same every time, again and again, allowed to change only the subtlest of gestures.

**pulsing, bleeding, howling. Teeth embryos; each with its screaming song...**

HE CLIMBS OUT TO THE STREET FROM THE GLASSED-IN places, for air and a look at the few people on the sidewalks. They are walking hands in pockets, blinkered with shades or plugged into one-eye vids, kicking at piles of trash as a child will kick leaves in autumn. A dog sniffs at him and finds no scent.

The wall of the building across the street is a giant screen, bursting with turbulent movement, a commercial promo for the newest TriV sensation, holos of faces and bodies morphing in burning colors through numberless human, animal, and phantasmagorical combinations, bodies twining and thrusting into a thousand orgies at once, wound with serpents, chimeras, sphinxes and hippogryphs. Rain cannot help himself but must stop and watch. Arms, legs, heads and hooves leap out at him, the faces pulsing, bleeding, howling. Teeth become tusks and noses swirl into grotesque trunks; eyes become mouths, spitting stars and embryos; each with its screaming song, it gapes and engulfs, becomes Leviathan in a million cascading scales—

He gapes, he is the scaled Leviathan—

Someone who has not been blinded or deafened is watching him. He sees himself in those eyes and, startled, catches his reflection in the glass panel of a door: rigid carp mouth opening into the whale's ribbed cavern, pearl eyes and opalescent scales scattering down his jaw, the monster.

He recoils in terror, does not know where to run.

"Rain, is it?" the face says. "Thought I recognized you, Rain."

The voice is kind. The face is Korzybski, his liaison, curly black beard and eyes popping with contacts not quite the right color. Down the street three transvestite men in Cleopatra wigs are gesturing and grinning at Rain with their blue jaws. He is shaking. Do I recognize myself? I am Rain. His face wanes slowly into the old mask.

Korzybski waits with a calm face for him to get settled. "Just taking a break." He is a neurologist and also visits patients at seniors' homes. "Join me in a cup of coffee?"

Earthly food will not nourish Rain but it is not poisonous either. He falls into step with Korzybski, regains his sidewalk self. It is almost time for their monthly appointment anyway, Rain's endless reorientation with the alien world.

They begin a mild discussion about Thorbian affairs. Korzybski brings up the possibility of getting funds for Thorbians from various levels of government, to help them meet each other, make more effective job placements, become a real culture among the multicultures of nations.

Rain drinks his coffee iced and says nothing. He is sure that Korzybski knows how many Thorbians there are in the world and he does not know or care. Sometimes in the corridors or on the moving ramps, sometimes even up in the almost empty streets he sees others that he thinks might come from the world Thorb. There are three or four online that he plays electronic games with, or even visits at rare times. He and the others call the world "Thorb" because Earth calls it that. He doesn't know what its inhabitants call it because he knows none of its languages. He remembers reading long ago of a parrot that was the only living speaker of its owners' language.

The message was deciphered by military decoders from Earth by methods used over millennia, making use as well of what had been learned about the signals from those other few worlds. Perhaps the desperate battlers on "Thorb" who were aiming their message at Earth had learned their own codes from Earthly communications. But the few adults tending the crèche in the ship were found dead, and could tell the worlds nothing of themselves except their vaguest outlines, had only broadcast their children as seeds out into the void.

Of course Earth was frightened then of the seeds taking root, and there were 15 years of quarantine when the nations stared at the children of Thorb through razor wire, watching how the colors flickered on them, how their shapes trembled and reformed. Rain had seen all of that himself a thousand times on the vid records. Nations had even stopped their warring to meditate on Thorbians. There have been 2,374 religions that have flared and died around them. But there was no money in them, and everyone has seen them and their shape-shifting on TriV. Unavoidably the world has found other marvels, moved away from them. Now it does not even matter if they mate or reproduce—their bodies, not their dreams have told them how to do that.

But they are afraid.

Rain knows that without asking. And he does not think that the governments that cannot keep the streets clean and the skies clear are likely to find funds for Thorbians or their children.

He pays for his coffee, says goodbye to Korzybski and continues down the street. Perhaps one day holograms will walk down this street, superimposed on the garbage, and even visit old men in the hospital.

HOME, RAIN LIES DROWSING, WAITING FOR THE LAST task of the day, an evening one. Toward evening Thorb's sun sinks down its western slope, and the morning growths of white and gold in the green-flash sky burn smokelessly and fall away into blackness and hazy blue. There is no moon on this world of Rain's dreams. Perhaps the world is a moon itself, and the lights in its sky are sun and planet. Rain believes his dreams are racial memories but is afraid to tell them to the others on his network for fear they are nothing but wish-fulfillments, his world nothing more than a dream. He has never even felt familiarity with the trueform shape the vids have shown him.

At 7 o'clock Rain rises from bed, refreshes his form and dresses in a tuxedo to escort a woman—who has asked him, is paying him to "come as you are"—and take her to dinner. Man of a thousand faces, which is he?

He watches her head and shoulders rotating in the 3-D, her laughing brown face, neck scarfed with diamonds, and piled-high black

hair with its streak of white lightning. Her earrings hang to her shoulders and glitter as she turns.

As you are. He summons his hopeful morning face, and hides the formal wear under a black waterproof and a fedora. It's not good to look prosperous in the malls.

He doesn't expect Lucilla Farrell to be young or beautiful; none of the employers buying his evening presence ever have been. Some vain customers want him to be a beauty, man or woman, some want a lost love, or perhaps even a double. Some only want not to be alone at dinner, theater, or gambling casino. Rain pushes the button at her door.

The panel lights up with its holo, her laughing face cries, "Come on right in!" and the door opens.

He steps into the foyer carefully among the acrylics and white leather.

"Just a minute!" A rustle, a flurry and she bursts on him. "Helloo, honey, are you ready for me?"

He stands a little back from this wave of color and scent. "I hope so!" She is spangled in rainbow colors, an older but accurate version of the holo she'd sent him.

**He is terrified but he cannot stop. He crouches roaring, his collar... and his arms reach out of his sleeves, fanged**

"HELLO, RAIN! RAIN, I LIKE THAT NAME." SHE rattles bracelets and stands back in turn to look at him. No need to explain; she knows Thorbians. "Hand me that coat in the closet there, sweetheart, and let's go!"

She wraps herself in black velvet, whisks him up to the roof, into a helicab, across the city. He listens and dares relax under the barrage of exclamation points. They are not aimed at him. Her tongue rattles with gossip and he need not answer.

The cab alights on the landing pad of the Opera House along with a hundred others, laying passengers like eggs and rising again like brilliant winged beetles. The elevator shaft is crystal, and the theater a nest of plush and carpet. He has never been among so many people, his skin prickles slightly at the closeness of all this flesh and fabric, and even the brilliant lights seem smothered by it. But he pushes down the mild terror of guiding Lucilla to her seat while she waves to acquaintances and shows off her escort subtly by giving no sign of his attendance.

Once he has slipped away from his fear, he wishes his eyes were cameras to record the features and movements of all these people, the men in heavy black and the women in shimmering dresses. He has never seen any kind of live performance, Earthly music is nothing to him, and he does not understand and hardly hears the opera, Montecassini's *Great General in the Gulf of Persia*, with Ishiro Hoshizaki singing the role of Schwartzkopf. He watches the little figure, stamping around in gold braid, to see how his limbs move and to observe the gestures of his head and hands.

It is intermission, the lights come up again, and there are more people in the lobby. He wonders if there are other Thorbians here and watches, while Lucilla waves and yoohoos. He drinks mineral water with a twist of lime, studies and imitates the attitudes of the men, hand in pocket, elbow on the bar. No one is looking at him. He is perfect.

Or nearly. There is a couple, "Hello, Lucilla dear!" A very thin white-blond woman in a dress beaded with lilies and a bulky man with a red face and black hair kiss the air near Lucilla's ears.

"Lee and Jerry Woodson," Lucilla says, "friends of my husband. This is Rain."

This woman, Lee Woodson, really looks at him. "Yes," she says. "How do you do. Do you come to the opera often?"

"No, this is my first time," Rain says.

"Really? Well," she says. "Lucilla is very fond of Thorbians."

Lucilla looks up from her gin sling and says coolly, "Keeping track of me, are you, Lee?"

"Only as a friend, Lucie. Tell me, Mr. Rain—"

"I'm getting another drink, back in a minute." Jerry Woodson is searching around the room for another bull-of-the-woods to measure himself against. Lucilla tries to find others to halloo at, but Lee will not be dislodged.

Rain braces himself against the intensity of this vulpine woman.

"Tell me, Mr. Rain, I imagine people ask you many questions?"

"Not always, but sometimes they do." He waits for the one she is determined to ask him.

She says in a low steady voice, "Has anyone ever asked you what you've got under all those human clothes?"

"Yes," he says, smiling.

"And what do you say?"

He laughs gently, "I say, Give me a kiss and I'll show you!"

Bells ring to end intermission and Lucilla pulls him away quickly. Her hand is very hot on his arm. "I heard all that," she mutters. He can feel rather than see Lee's sharp white face shrinking to a dot behind him. "Your husband needs some new friends." He lets the bitter words slip quickly, his guard overcome for once, and regrets them, but she shakes her head and sets her earrings swinging.

"I went along with them for his sake," she snaps, then with a grin adds, "He was a sweet guy and I gave him his money's worth before he wore out. They just think he married a long way below himself."

In his mind Rain can hear Lee Woodson saying, "Poor Lucie, reduced to buying Thorbs, and she used to think she was really something." He pushes that away, but there is not much to say after that, and he watches the Great General Schwartzkopf conquering his enemies and winning beribboned medals and golden crowns, and after that the great tenor Hoshizaki being draped with wreaths and garlands.

AS THEY RISE TO THE ROOF IN THE CRYSTAL ELEVATOR, they can see the helicabs descending from above, and it is no more than a few minutes until they are standing before her door. In the mirrored hall he catches one flash of his reflection: a blond man in a tuxedo, coat over his arm.

Her door is open and she faces him. He would not go in among all that leather and acrylic if she asked. She is smiling. "Don't be hard on them. I'm a whole other kind, and it was a good evening." You go along with them. But she is laughing and alive. "Give me a kiss and I'll show you," she says with a dirty snigger, "I love it!" then takes his face between her hands and kisses his mouth. "Goodnight sweetheart, I love you." She steps back into her world, the door closes, its panel is blank.

He stands there with her kiss on his lips. In that moment, he finds himself burning with a feeling, a passion not for her but for fulfillment and a being who would truly share it with him. No one has ever touched him like this, a real touch in which he feels whole-

bodied among the aliens. It's a fearful feeling too, the threatening hope of love. He cannot afford it.

He backs off, waves away the helicab. It cannot take him where he is going. Her money will fall silently into his account, as it fell into the cabman's. He finds the elevator and descends, descends, trying not to think of this as symbolic, because he will sink into self-pity.

There are many deep levels, but he comes out at his own, even with the street. He has nearly an hour's walk through the arcades of shops, restaurants, and little gardens that keep the cool air moist and fresh. He passes a holovue theater featuring something called "A Thorbian Lover," advertised in a fountain of lights promising "Dangerous Satisfactions," without pausing or turning aside, walking in the shadow with his coat buttoned to the neck and his hat pulled down. People are coming out of the theater and he keeps neatly ahead of them. There are more theaters and restaurants, bars and sex shops, a little park with a lot of hands-on lovers, then an open market selling star-fruit, marijuana plants and dried jimson weed.

Beside it there is a Beggars' Square, an arrangement of painted squares with a tree planted in the center. By city ordinance the beggars must keep inside the squares and not harass the shoppers. Rain keeps coins to give the beggars, it is a kind of rent he pays the world, but coins cannot liven their dead eyes, and he always hurries away after tossing a few into their cups and bowls. "Mister! Mister!" they call and wave, and he stands undecided with his hand in his pocket.

his head and neck push thickly out of and furred, tawny, spotted and savage.

ONE BEGGAR CATCHES HIS ATTENTION. HE IS MOVING, but not like the others who gesture; he is shimmering. This beggar's eyes are not dead but feverish, and as they rest on Rain, his body shifts and flows to become Rain, a blond man in a black coat. It seems to Rain that he has poisoned himself with weed or alcohol, toxic for Thorbians. The fever heat is coming off his body. He lifts his hands in imitation of Rain's surprise.

"No, no!" Rain whispers, pulls the handful of silver from his pocket, flings it into the bowl and backs away.

Three young loungers in silk and leather have begun to tease the beggars. Now they glance aside and find this one. He looks up at them hopefully and in turn—rippling and wavering into cloudy and then distinct form—becomes the girl in leather with the blond flattop, the teenager with slick hair in the silk suit, the man in his twenties with the blue velvet suit and beard dyed to match. As if poison has given him the energy to do endless whole-body modeling without having to think or plan.

"Look at this one!" Bluebeard says. "Let's see!" He kicks the bowl and sets it spinning, flinging arcs of silver.

The other beggars freeze. Rain feels himself shrinking in his clothes and takes an involuntary step back. The Thorbian's impetus halts. He stops in half-gesture with his hands out and his face gone featureless and slack like the canvas face of the Scarecrow in the *Wizard of Oz*.

The three of them guffaw and kick at him. "What're you gonna be now, blobbo?" The other beggars have scuttled off their squares and run out of the park; no one is left but the four. The Thorbian shimmers, trying to pull away, trying to find a form that will let him.

"Who! Who!" they yell.

"Please!" he cries weakly, "My name, I am Frost." Water begins to seep from his skin, and he cannot do more than wave his arms.

"Frost! I think yer melting, Frost! Look, he's peeing!"

Rain recognizes the shrinking-from-danger syndrome that he had spent so much time learning to control in his own youth.

"Look at that! That's disgusting!" They aim more kicks.

Rain wants nothing but to run away and finds himself leaping forward screaming, "Stop that! Damn you bastards, stop!"

They turn on him. "What've we got? This's another one!"

Rain can smell them now, they are so close. He is terrified but he cannot stop. He flicks off his hat and crouches screaming, or roaring, his head and neck push thickly out of his collar, his shirt opens, the tie snaps and falls away, and his arms reach out of his sleeves, fanged and furred, tawny, spotted and savage. He is sinuous in his long and awkward coat, his claws splay out—

The three tormentors freeze.

The girl swallows, licks her lips and says, "Aw, that's nothin'! That isn't real, it's just one of his shapes."

Rain roars and takes a step forward, and she backs away.

They breathe hard for a moment and Bluebeard snarls, "I don't give a fuck what he is, there's a cop coming and I'm outa here."

Rain stands stupefied, watching them run away while his fangs dig into his lower jaw and his milky blood trickles and drips off his chin. He is frightened at the jolt of creepy pleasure his savagery has given him and does not even know what he has been trying to make of himself, some generic cat, ocelot or lynx he has seen on the vid. His hearts are going beatbeat-beatbeat, his neural ganglions are throbbing. He feels the water beginning to run off his own skin, and if he cannot replace it in a few minutes, he will be too small for his clothes and look like a clown. The beggar, shrunk somewhat but not badly hurt, is moving weakly to pick up the coins, and Rain wants to help him but does not dare. He's sure someone will yell, "Hey you! Blobbo!" and he is terrified. He also does not want the police near him.

He grabs his hat and ruined tie. Carefully maintaining what form he can, he searches out a fountain. There is one just over there in that little park. He drinks, then sits down on a bench. His hearts slow down, his head clears. No one is looking at him, no one will bother him. He's had a panic attack, that's all, rebounding from the anger, but now he is in control. He lifts his hand to loosen his sweaty collar and finds that there are still talons on the ends of the fingers and stubby hairs around them.

He stuffs his hand in his pocket hastily and lets it reshape, gets up and walks home. No one notices him.

THE BEGGAR HAUNTS HIM. I AM FROST.

I could have sheltered Frost. No he can't, not one so sickly and half mad too. Frost needs the kind of care he himself was given that time he had the fungus disease, with a specialist in that little hospital place that Korzybski arranged for him. He will ask Korzybski, something he can do.

He prepares for bed, puts the tuxedo away in his wardrobe with clothes to be cleaned, throws his shoes into the cycler: they were wrecked by the talons that sprang through them. He washes himself, settles carefully into his semishape. Once he came home after a hard night, lay down as he was, and woke as the same pale blond man. He doesn't want to be imprisoned in that shape.

Tomorrow there will be a live Albert wanting to tell a dead or divorced Debora how he hates her guts and misses her. Albert and Debora, Lucilla and Berenice pay for his life among the aliens.

In his dream the green sky flashes and the gray and yellow growths surge up as the sun rises. □

I Quit!

Sometimes it's difficult to decide which is worse – killing the goose that lays the golden eggs, or letting it live!

# THE WEALTH OF KINGDOMS
## *(An Inflationary Tale)*

BY DANIEL HOOD

*Illustration by Annie Lunsford*

THE CURRENT LOCAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION CAN BE TRACED TO the recent destabilizing influx of hard currency, in the form of golden eggs, precipitated by the transfer of assets from the Giant of the Beanstalk to Jack, a poverty-line family agriculturist living in the resource-poor hinterlands in the east of the kingdom.

Jack's rapid ascent from subsistence farming to independent wealth and the concomitant stresses placed on the local economy and later, the entire kingdom's economy, deserve a closer look. Indeed, as we hope to prove in this case study, his ascent lies at the root of many of the troubles our kingdom is experiencing at the moment. We will begin by discussing the microeconomic results and then broaden our discussion to the macroeconomic issues.

### Jack's Rise to Wealth and Its Impact on the Local Economy

The morning after liberating the Golden Goose from the Giant, Jack immediately used his new wealth to hire several local carters to haul away the Giant's corpse. Because he had not yet found a way to break the eggs, he paid the farmers with one apiece, creating a momentary boom for the transport trade in the region and increasing the tax base to the point where local administrators could begin improving roads, bridges and other infrastructures.

In addition, Jack built himself and his mother a new house, a grand estate that sparked a round of conspicuous consumption among the provincial gentry as they tried to keep up with him. He also donated the Beanstalk to the local poor and the struggling farmers, providing a sort of primitive welfare system.

All well and good, it must have seemed at the time, and indeed the media—town criers, wandering bards and the like—applauded the generally positive upward trend, giving Jack much of the credit.

However, after a brief period of relatively high expectations, the provincial economy began to suffer, for the following reasons:

1. Jack's habit of paying for goods and services with whole eggs (he had not yet acquired the necessary technology for breaking them into smaller pieces) caused a rapid inflationary spiral, as people with large, oval hunks of gold began to compete for the few consumer goods available in this primarily agricultural, self- sufficient region.

2. The unrealistic rise in real estate and construction activity, which inevitably slowed after a period of months.

3. An increase in the number of below-poverty-line farmers, as those who could provide neither goods nor services in return for gold were turned off their land, hit by inflation, and forced to join those on the Beanstalk Dole.

4. The depletion of the Beanstalk Dole itself, as more and more people clamored for the rapidly-diminishing trunk. When the Beanstalk was finished, Jack did not realize that a substitute was necessary, and many of those who had been forced to rely on it for food found themselves without. This engendered a rural mob of sorts, a mass of unemployed, jobless wanderers with dangerous expectations of governmental assistance.

5. The strains placed on local government. Noblemen and officials found themselves faced with a growing underclass expecting beanstalk-type largess. At the same time, the rise in tax revenue from Jack's initial infusion of Golden Goose eggs had caused them to invest in long-term infrastructure projects, many of which were financed with equally long-term debt. When the tax revenues leveled off (because Jack had stopped handing out the eggs left and right, as he had at first), the local government was forced into deficit spending.

6. Unrealistic expectations on the part of carters, who began to refuse to transfer goods for any form of payment other than golden eggs. Those farmers who had managed to continue to grow staple food crops found their produce rotting in their barns because wagoners would not carry

them. (For more information, see Grimm & Grimm's excellent *Yokes, Yolks and Yokels: The Carter's Guild in the Eastern Provinces.)*

7. Finally, a rash of plagues and diseases that decimated the local population. Environmental studies have revealed that much of this was the result of the Giant's corpse being hauled by the carters into the mountains, which were the source of the area's water. When the corpse rotted, it contaminated the water, which gave rise to devastating diseases.

This last might have had a salutary effect: the decrease in the population of laborers and the rural mob (who were particularly hard hit) might have eventually evened out the inflationary spiral by bringing scant resources and the smaller population into proportion.

However, at this point Jack decided to move to the capital, perhaps because of the growing problems of the countryside (for which he himself was largely responsible), and his actions began to have a much broader effect on the kingdom as a whole.

### Crucified on an Egg of Gold: Jack in the Capital

Jack's entry into the royal city, as initially happened in the countryside, was attended by a honeymoon period. The city was far better able to accommodate the influx of golden eggs, and Jack was also put in touch with the proper smelting technology for breaking his eggs into smaller pieces, facilitating a more reasonable market price.

Indeed, the grace period lasted far longer here, and for almost three years Jack was a force for progress in the national economy. The greater pool of luxury goods at his disposal allowed a natural outlet for his growing income (the goose had, due to the new and scientifically-improved feeds being developed in the capital, nearly doubled production), and the higher taxes imposed by Prince Charming's government siphoned off much of the excess.

Jack's spending encouraged greater trade, and routes were opened or expanded that connected the kingdom with Never-Never Land, Oz and Wonderland. The boost in both exports and imports allowed for higher tax revenues, which the Charming Government used to both improve the infrastructure and deal with many of the problems Jack had caused in the countryside. The Ministers of Straw, Wood and Brick in particular were the main architects of this pump priming (again, for details, see Grimm & Grimm's *Huffing and Puffing and Building Your Economy Up).*

Private sector industry experienced a long-lasting healthy boom as well. In partnership with the venture capitalist Rumpelstiltskin, Jack began the development of the Giant's former kingdom in the clouds. A new Beanstalk was grown and an entire complex of condominiums and amusement parks was erected around the Giant's castle, as well as various public housing projects legislated by the Charming Government. A number of joint ventures were formed, of particular importance those with Mad Hatter, Inc., of Wonderland, for importing tea, and with the Wizard of Oz for importing brains, courage and hearts. (Baum's *Imports and Exports and Tariffs—Oh My!* offers a brief but informative history of the last.)

But the honeymoon was brief. Jack and Rumpelstiltskin's Cloud Kingdom Development Zone began to draw more and more workers from the earth-bound economy. Inflation began to spiral again, and then the Charming Government was rocked by internal dissension. The Three Pigs resigned in disgust and were replaced by the much less effective Three Bears. Various protest groups sprang up, most notably the quasi-socialist Red Seven, former associates of Queen Snow White, who claimed that Jack's Golden Goose was ruining the gold industry by undercutting their prices. Interest groups like the Orphan's Defense Fund, run by social activists Hansel and Gretel, were calling for more governmental funds for the underprivileged and harsher punishments for witches.

Finally, the illusory health of the kingdom's economy was shattered by the Elves' wildcat strike. By walking out on the old Shoemaker, they literally halted the kingdom in its tracks—without shoes, no one could go anywhere. (When told that the peasants had no shoes, King Charming's daughter-in-law Princess Cinderella is reputed to have answered, "Let them wear glass slippers!" Andersen's *Forced to Work All Night: The Unionization of the Shoemaker's Elves* makes the point that Cinderella's comment was typical of the Charming Government's basic failure to understand the situation.)

The unlikely Pinocchio was chosen to replace the disgraced Three Bears. With little credibility and an inability to lie effectively in public, a worse puppet could not have been appointed. He caved in to literally every demand—nationalizing the shoe industry, raising prohibitive tariffs, funding all social programs (whether effective or not) with huge deficits, and raising taxes through the roof.

***Pinocchio was chosen to replace the disgraced Three Bears. With little credibility and an inability to lie effectively in public, a worse puppet could not have been appointed. He caved in to literally every demand --- nationalizing the shoe industry, raising prohibitive tariffs, funding all social programs...***

Wonderland and Oz responded by forming a free trade area that effectively forbade trade with our kingdom, and Never-Never Land's impulsive Minister of Finance Pan enacted an open embargo.

Confidence in the government fell to an all-time low. The Red Seven began a series of terrorist attacks, the Elves took to the streets again, and Jack and Rumpelstiltskin were forced to close off immigration to the Cloud Kingdom.

With the kingdom poised on the brink of disaster, the final straw broke the camel's back. As part of his immense establishment, Jack had hired a cook from England, whose cuisine apparently made up for his stupidity. On Christmas Day, unable to find another goose in the larder, he killed and cooked the golden egg producer, serving it up as the main course at Christmas dinner.

Black Christmas, as it has come to be known, effectively crippled the kingdom. Without the Golden Goose to support the Charming Government's gold standard, kingdom money became worthless, and inflation rose to an unheard-of 200 percent.

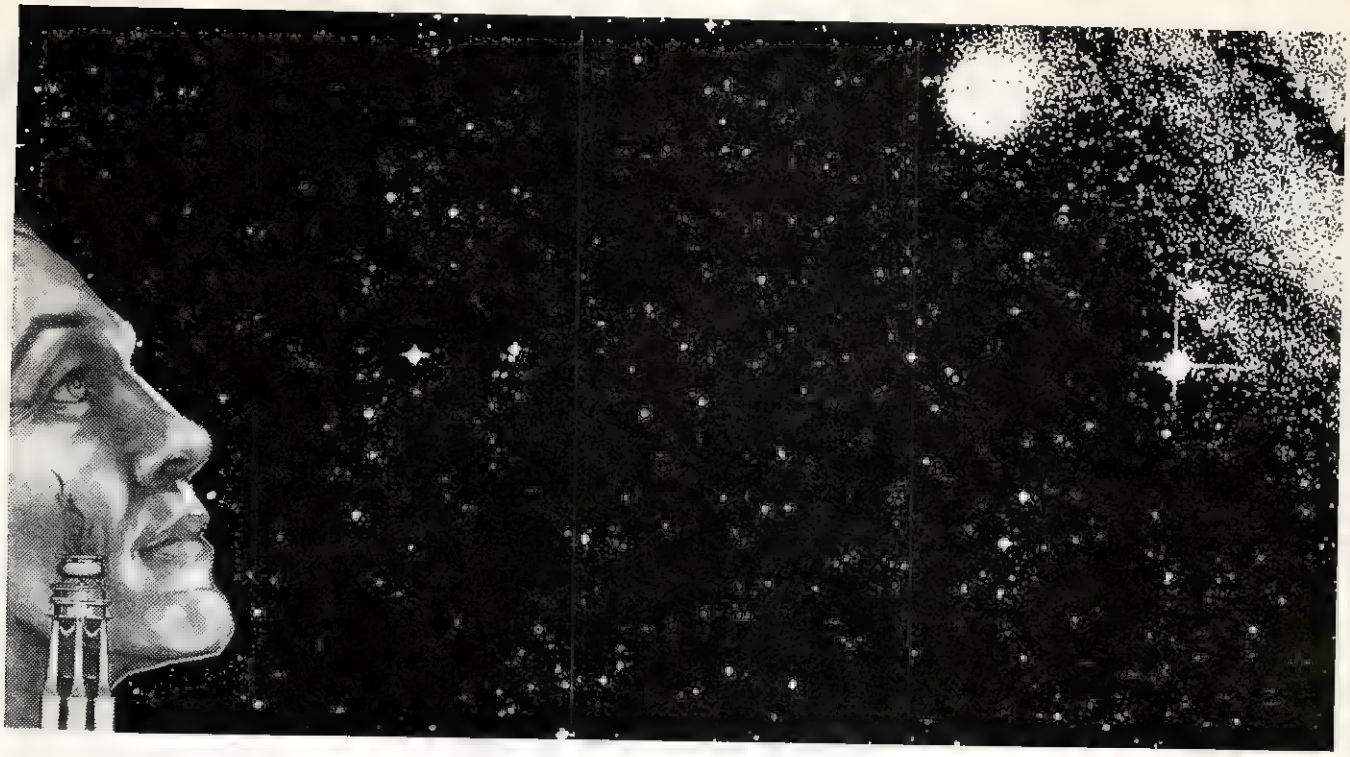
Only the immediate declaration of martial law by the Charming Government, now with the shrewd Riding Hood as prime minister, saved the kingdom from potential civil war.

From this point of view, few can doubt that Jack is immediately responsible for most of the ills currently facing the kingdom. Riding Hood's policies—the removal of all subsidies (except those for grandmothers); her vigorous pursuit of harsh punishments for terrorists, monopolists, and wolves; and the re-opening of trade with other kingdoms—may enable us to gradually work our way back to economic health.

But recovery is a slow, painful process, with no quick fixes or easy solutions. As Prime Minister Riding Hood herself pointed out (in *What Big Expectations You Have*, a recently released government white paper offering bleak near-term prospects), "If you take short cuts, you usually end up in a wolf's belly."

This is the real world after all—not some fairy tale. □

# TOWARD THE INFINITE



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# BOOKS

*Continued from page 19*

whom we think of as making up the Golden Age of Science Fiction—L. Ron Hubbard, Ray Palmer, John W. Campbell, Ray Cummings and others. Maxfield Parrish was a heavy influence on his artwork, which contained an alien sensuality that allowed Bok to capture the scientific romanticism of, for example, Roger Zelazny's classic "A Rose for Ecclesiastes." That 1963 magazine cover was sadly to prove Bok's last illustration in the field. To celebrate this seminal SF artist, Stephen D. Korshak has edited *A Hannes Bok Treasury* (Underwood/Miller, 112 pages, trade paperback $17.95, clothbound $29.95), which contains an introduction by Ray Bradbury. The volume celebrates three decades in the career of one of the most unique artists in the field. Bok once wrote, "I like to make pictures showing things not as they are, which we all know too well, but pictures of things as they might be." Once you view this gallery of his work, you'll agree that whether those "things that might be" are beautiful or terrifying, they are always magnificent and well worth your attention.

•Science fiction may have invented cyberpunk, but now that plugged-in concept has escaped to infect the world at large. William Gibson's brainchild is no longer confined in the pages of an Ace Special, but like a computer virus has gone on to infect entities as diverse as *Newsweek*, prime time network TV, and Oliver Stone. But the true technological revolutionaries cannot be found in the pages and on the screens of the mainstream media. They're off on the fringes of society, in fanzines and on computer networks, in territories difficult to traverse without a map. Richard Kadrey has provided us with that map in *Covert Culture Sourcebook* (St. Martin's Press, 224 pages, trade paperback $12.95). Kadrey, author of *Metrophage*, one of the earliest in-your-face cyberpunk manifestos, has exposed society's hipper than hip underbelly of fringe subcultures—those who live and die on the computer nets, proselytizers for body piercing, tattooing and ritual scarification, people who engage in sexual practices armed with devices and costumes the likes of which most of us will only encounter in SF novels. An intriguing guide to today's taboos and tribalisms, Kadrey wrote this fascinating book so you wouldn't have to.

•For good or for ill, whether we think we've evolved beyond them or not, spaceships have become the world's central image of science fiction. Even our own Hugo Award, which we present to the best works of the year, emulates the rocket's streamlined form, striving to lift off to a better world. And so Ron Miller's *The Dream Machines: An Illustrated History of the Spaceship in Art, Science and Literature* (Krieger Publishing Company, 744 pages, hardcover, $112.50), a history of spaceships in both fiction and technology, is at its heart a history of science fiction itself, and of science as well. Miller, whose work has graced a number of stories in the pages of this magazine, is one of the field's best space artists. He has assembled a massive volume, which tracks rocketry chronologically from 360 B.C. through projections of where humanity should stand by 2004. Cleanly written and illustrated with many period photographs and drawings, this book contains everything you ever wanted to know about spaceships. Arthur C. Clarke's brief foreword sets the proper tone. If you feel you can't afford this one, you should at the very least clip this blurb and try to convince your library to stock a copy. Miller does a commendable job of letting us know both where science and science fiction have been, and where they're going.

*Hannes Bok's illustration for "War God's Gamble", by Harry Walton, 1951.*

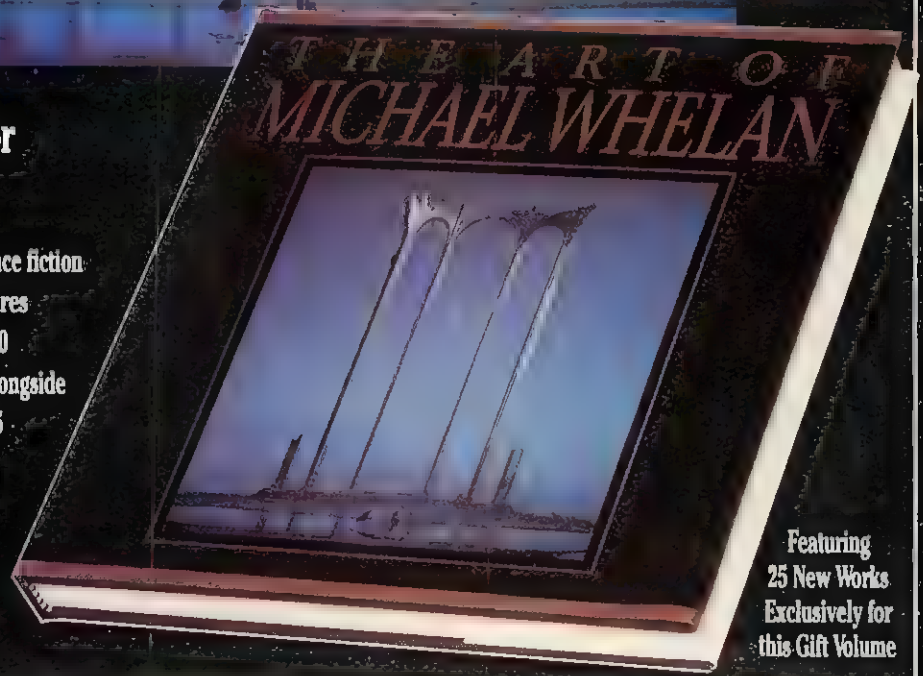
•Going off-planet is not the only way to visit the alien. Joe Haldeman, Nebula and Hugo-Award-winning author of *The Forever War* and most recently *The Hemingway Hoax*, came face to face with his personal piece of the strange and foreign on the unfriendly terrain of Southeast Asia. *Vietnam and Other Alien Worlds* (NESFA Press, 226 pages, hardcover, trade $17.00, signed and slipcased $30.00) pulls together fiction, essays and poetry, much of it previously unpublished, to tell us tales both horrifying and surreal (and sometimes true) about the ways that human beings become aliens to themselves. "Life begins in a bloody mess and sometimes it ends the same way, and only odd people seek out blood between those times, maybe crazy people," is how "Passages," the first story in the collection begins, a lesson Haldeman knows well, having learned it during a tour of duty in America's most unpopular war. From his debut book onward, he has imbued his military science fiction with a realism that Heinlein strived for but never achieved, and a world weariness and disdain for battle that Heinlein would never have attempted, but which speaks true to the experiences of every grunt who ever wondered what madness brought him to die in a foreign jungle. Haldeman's work is one of the few focal points where military hard SF and sociological literary SF meet and mingle successfully, and this well-produced collection proves why.

•Shakespeare once wrote that the fault was not in our stars, but in ourselves. Sometimes, though, as when reading scientifically inaccurate science fiction which places side by side stars that are on opposite sides of the universe, the fault of the stars is ourselves. That's why Terry Kepner has written *Proximity Zero: A Writer's Guide to the Nearest 200 Stars* (The Bob Liddil Group, 52 pages, 8½ inches by 11 inches, spiral bound, $14.95), to provide a working tool for writers who don't want to get a degree in astronomy to write believable space adventures. The volume is full of fascinating material, such as each star's constellation, brightness, stellar classification, exact location in the night sky of Earth, etc., as well as information on which stars might have planets where human-like life could survive. The book also contains 13 maps covering all stars within a 40-light-year radius of Earth. Whether you are a writer yourself or just a reader who wants to use it to try to catch your favorite writers in fatal errors, this book is worth owning.

•Going out of print is something even our best authors do when they are no longer around to work the convention circuit, promote their books, and pull their older works back into print with the power of their new ones. Luckily, art can triumph over death with the help of the SF small press, which is devoted to keeping in print many authors whom the large mass market presses don't find profitable enough to keep around. Cordwainer Smith, who died in 1966, was one of our best. *The Rediscovery of Man* (NESFA Press, 672 Pages, hardcover, $24.95) brings back into print Smith's complete short SF, and is a publishing event not to be ignored. Cordwainer Smith was the pseudonym of Dr. Paul Linebarger, who grew up in China, Japan, France and Germany and was the godson of Sun-Yat Sen. Outside of the genre, he wrote *Psychological Warfare*, which is still considered a standard reference work in that field.

But it is for his classic SF stories such as "Scanners Live in Vain" and "The Ballad of Lost C'Mell" that he is most fondly remembered. His short stories, of which there are 33 in this volume, together tell the story of humanity's far-flung future, when cyborg space pilots sail the universe, hinting at Ancient Wars and a Dark Age. Smith's future history, known as the Instrumentality Saga, is filled with action, adventure, poetry and romance, plus the sense of wonder that makes the best SF.

# MICHAEL WHELAN

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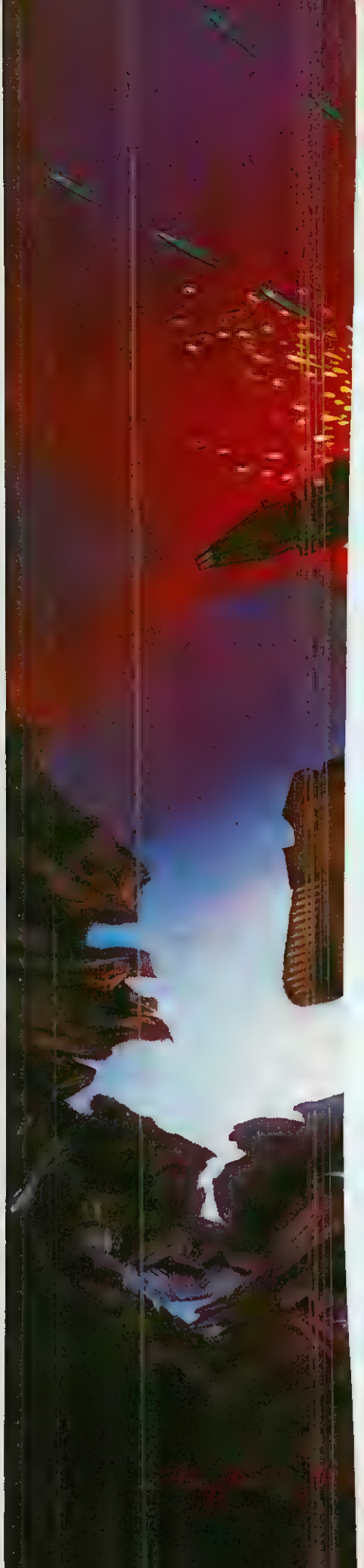
The creator of *Hammer's Slammers* celebrates the hauntingly unique paintings of Steve Hickman.

# HICKMANIA

BY DAVID DRAKE



THE BEST PLACE TO START A DISCUSSION OF STEVE HICKman's art is with Larry Niven's The Man-Kzin Wars, because it has what is objectively one of the best cover paintings ever put on a science fiction book.

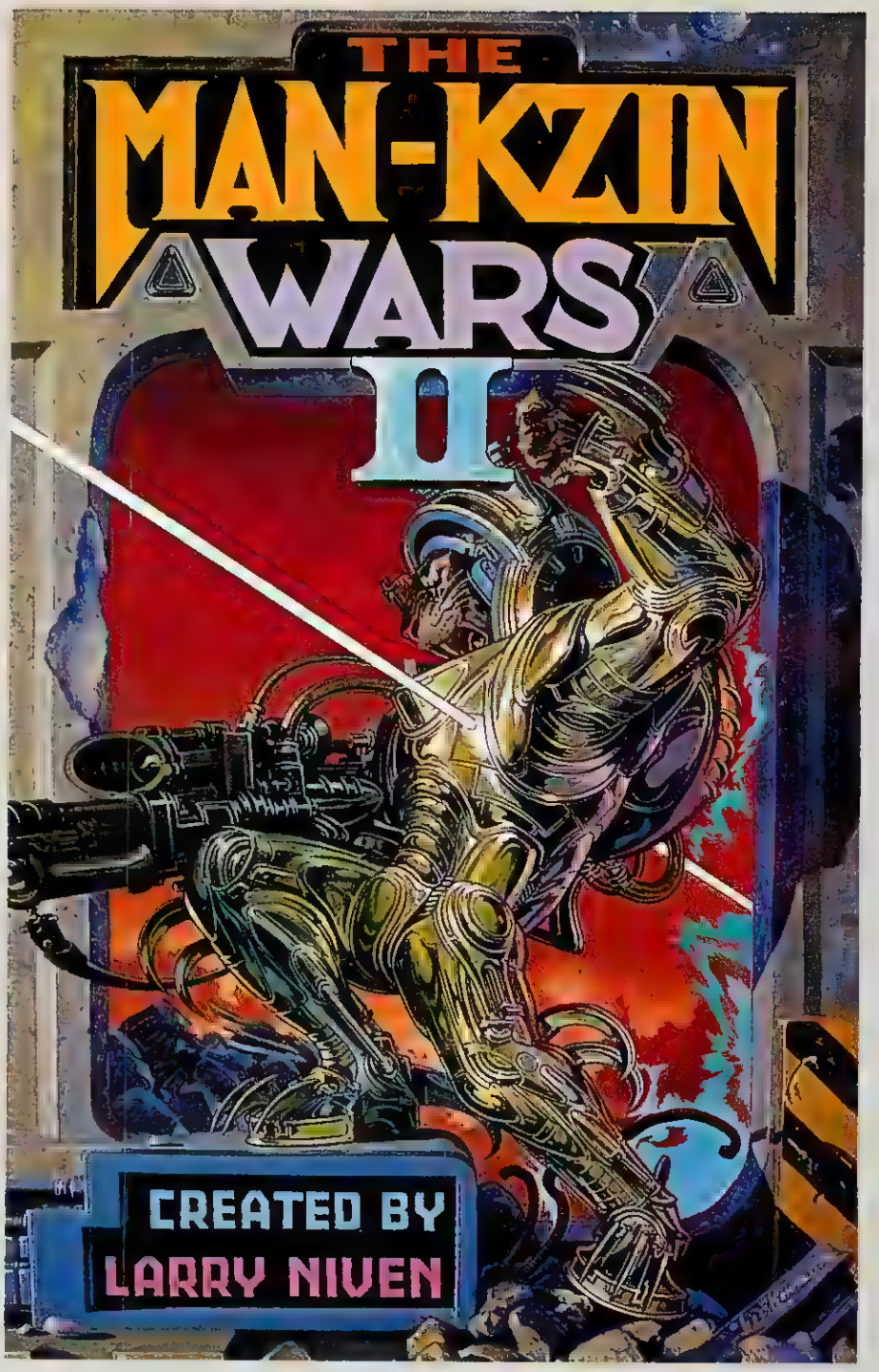
Yes, I do mean *objectively.* This judgment has nothing to do with opinion, mine or anybody else's. I'm basing my statement on this title's sell-through, which is the insider's term for the percentage of the books shipped by a publisher which are actually bought by readers. About 10 percent of these books simply get lost in a distributor's warehouse, slashed when a kid opens the carton with a knife, or dropped off a truck into a mud puddle. Mechanical wastage is as true for books as it is for carrots.

Many things affect sell-through, particularly the author's name-recognition and reputation. (Have readers ever heard of him or her? Were other books by the same author boring dreck despite the hype?) Sales spurred by good word-of-mouth may cause a publisher to reprint quickly because of unexpected demand. But neither word-of-mouth nor the author's name will snatch *all* the distributed books off the racks in the very brief period they're on display. Only the cover painting can do that,a cover painting by an artist such as Steve Hickman.

*Charles Sheffield's novel* Brother to Dragons *told the story of tomorrow's Job, and gave Hickman an opportunity to paint fierce futuristic warbots.*

THE TEMPLE — BY — H. P. LOVECRAFT

*LEFT: One of Hickman's strengths is his adaptability to the work at hand, as shown by his ability to capture the mood of H. P. Lovecraft in* The Temple. *BELOW: David Drake says he's never had a better cover than this one for his* Lacey and His Friends, *a tale of a surveillance-addicted crime-ridden civilization. RIGHT: For Larry Niven's* The Man-Kzin Wars II *Hickman did his best to give this illo "the old pulp magazine spirit."*




The sell-through of that first printing of *The Man-Kzin Wars* was right on 90 percent. This sort of thing doesn't happen very often, but it happens more often to books with covers by Hickman than it does to those with covers by almost any other artist.

Hickman combines enormous technical skill with an absolute rigid honesty: an unwillingness to cut corners on a project. Hard work doesn't do any good unless it's directed by talent, but when the necessary talent *is* present, a little extra work can mean the difference between a good job and a stunning one. Sometimes his artistic conception is so wonderful that you forget the level of sheer craftsmanship required to execute that conception.

Hickman attended Richmond Professional Institute, where he studied fine arts with another fantasy artist, Mike Kaluta. He attributes the direction his life's work has taken to a trip the pair made in 1967 to one of the earliest comic book conventions. "It was the first con Frank Frazetta ever attended," said Hickman. "We met Roy Krenkel there, and he was charmed with us because we knew who Alphonse Mucha was, so he introduced us to Frazetta. That was a revelation. The reason we had gotten into fantasy illustration, I can trace back to the first Frazetta illo I'd even seen. It opened my eyes. Frazetta took the classical form and added an incredible mystic vision that made it tremendously exciting. He and Krenkel are the reason I'm in fantasy art today."

An example of Hickman's unique method of dealing with the fantastic is his cover for *Cthulhu*, a Robert E. Howard collection. Hickman decided to sculpt and photograph a statuette of the Great Old One as described by Howard's friend H.P. Lovecraft. The first part, the sculpture, went fine, but the next stage, photographing the result, ran into problems with reflections from the statuette's surface. Rather than turn in a flawed cover, Hickman went ahead and painted a *trompe l'oeil* image of the statuette, which resulted in a striking cover for a book that sold much better than expected.

When an artist likes dragons as much as Steve Hickman does, a gallery of his work ought have a dragon in it. Two dragons, in this case, because I'm so taken by the cover of Steve Brust's *Teckla.* The cover itself was embossed, a technique which publishers use to indicate that they've spent a great deal of money on the book. Embossing will often turn a decent painting into

*LEFT: Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Moon created* Sassinak, *but it took Hickman to give the spunky 12-year-old a face. BELOW: Hickman got in the mood for Steve Brust's* Teckla *by listening to real-life horrors of the past via a tape of Barbara Tuchman's* A Distant Mirror. *RIGHT: Crawford Kilian's* Gryphon *gave Hickman the chance to design an alien civilization.*

something ugly beyond words, but here Hickman chose a strong line that lent itself to the process.

Hickman has a remarkable talent for translating various schools of art into SF motifs, each time choosing the one that his artistic vision (his "bullheaded artistic vision," as one publisher said to me in wry approval) finds appropriate to the work illustrated. Contrast two women, both done on spec rather than as commissioned works: *The Goddess of Chaos* and *Norhala of the Lightnings* . Same artist, same medium, same model, same excellence: utterly different treatments.

And then contrast any of his previous paintings with the cover for *John the Balladeer* by Manly Wade Wellman; a subtle and excellent volume of what the author called mountainy stories. I think this one is as beautiful as the cover of any book with which I've been associated, subtly and excellently illustrated. It occurs to me that one of the reasons I like Steve Hickman's work so very much is that we share an affection for the same writers—Merritt, Wellman, and the *Weird Tales'* Smith/Lovecraft/Howard triumvirate assuredly among them. Hickman's own 1988 fantasy novel *The Lemurian Stone* proves that.

L. Sprague de Camp's *The Glory That Was* and Christopher Stasheff's *A Wizard in Bedlam* both involve the paradox of pre-modern social structures created through high technology. There are more similarities than that very basic one, and yet the cover paintings are nevertheless in striking contrast, each right for the book it illustrates.

When I looked at the pair of covers, I wondered whether the treatments would have worked if they'd been switched: something simple and robo-feudal on Stasheff's novel, and a group of contrasting figures framed by a mass of architecture on de Camp's. I suspect that most artists aren't bothered by questions like those: they're only competent in one technique, so they treat all their covers the same way. But how does somebody with the demonstrated ability to do *anything* decide which styles to apply to superficially similar novels?

Hanged if I know. I've come to the conclusion that the treatments could have been successfully reversed, though...so long as both were executed by Steve Hickman.

Have you noticed that the people on Hickman's covers have personalities? Sassinak has a quintessentially high-tech cover: hardware that looks as though it would work, lettering that could have been cast from metal. But the central image is a woman's face, framed but not mastered by her suit and weaponry. Hickman hasn't painted Sass merely as a stalwart hero. She's a person, a human being.

*And* a stalwart hero.

I've had many covers over the years. In my opinion and that of at least two of my publishers, the average quality of the art of those covers has been remarkably high. I attribute this to the degree of direct control I exert over what the artist creates for my book.

I exert no control. Zip, nada. I don't talk to the artist or to anybody on the publisher's staff as to how the cover should look. I react very badly to people telling me how to write, so I'm not about to give somebody else direction on how to paint an effective cover.

I'm absolutely certain that I can write a better David Drake book than anybody else can. Possibly some of the graphic artists involved aren't as arrogantly assured that they know their particular business better than anybody else does—but if so, I don't want to hear about it.

I guess that's another reason I like Steve Hickman's work so much. I *know* he feels the same way about his art.

So let me bring to your attention one last painting, this one from a book of mine: *Lacey and His Friends.* I have never had a better cover than this. With one exception, I have never had another cover this good.

For Steve Hickman, though, it's just part of a broad range of paintings: each unique; each precisely appropriate to the work it illustrates; each hauntingly wonderful. □

*By Terry Bisson*

# Kitchen Sink's *Flesh Crawlers* brings back SF's bug-eyed monsters.

*Bug-eyed Monsters have survived the '50s, and are set to invade the '90s in a new series from Kitchen Sink.*

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Comics are Mesofuckinzoic; they occupy that uncoveted but honorable place in our literature that was occupied for the Greeks by Fable, for the Romantics by Fairy Tale, for the Victorians by Doggerel. They are perpetually, proudly and forever kids' stuff.

Comics are novels that never grew up. And long after we ourselves are grown, we keep the favorite comics of our youth stacked in that room in our hearts that we keep unchanged, like a kid's room after he's gone to college; the room nobody is allowed to clean, much less rearrange.

But in spite of our best efforts (and no one is more conservative than kids), comics *do* change; and so for every generation, it is a different comic or group of comics that awakens this fierce protective sentiment. Every generation has a different-smelling mud on its shoes. For some it is the old DC gang; for some the early 1960s Marvel superheros; for others Little Lulu, or Uncle Scrooge, or even Captain Marvel and that silly dog.

For me (and many others) it was the short-lived, deeply demented, somewhat subversive EC horror comics of the early 1950s.

Comics started out as superhero stuff, during the Depression, and returned after World War II with still more superheroes. I tried them too early, when I could barely read. It was rich, thick, but bitter fare, like espresso. Even today, Superman and Wonder Woman are like Kipling to me—exotic, mysterious, redolent of a lost age, and a little too grown-up to be fun.

But that was all right, because by the time I could *really* read, comics were breaking new ground. Literally; with grave-diggers' spades. *Tales from the Crypt*, *Vault of Horror*, etc., had rotting corpses that walked, bells rung by bloody pulps, and butchers that sliced and wrapped rude customers. All the stuff kids love and grown-ups hate.

Is it any wonder that the old ECs were banned by 1954? They even had Congressional hearings about it. It wasn't just the pulp and the plasma. The grown-ups had the uneasy feeling that there was something else going on, that an un-American and chaotic vision lurked under the gore. And they were right. The ECs were part of a whole developing *zeitgeist* that included Ernie Kovacs and *Mad Magazine*, and went on to include Bob Dylan and the Weather Underground. The grown-ups were right to feel threatened, for the ECs were a tiny beginning of a rip in the social fabric that was to tear wider and wider, to the secret delight of more and more kids.

So the ECs were banned; they were canned; they were booted and coded and tipper-gored right out of our hot little hands. America (after getting its ass kicked in Korea) would have only righteous violence, and hold the blood. *Biffs* and *boffs* replaced the *glurphs* and *skralonkks* and butcher shop sounds. No guts please.

For me it was the death of comics. Somehow, in banning the blood, they had banned the story as well. Now instead of tiny, tight, admittedly cliché-ridden tales, we had epic endless adventures. Instead of plot twists, we had muscle and mission. I bailed out into the grown-up (well, sort of) world of science fiction, which led to—but that's another story.

Cut to the '60s. I hadn't read a comic in 10 years. I was in New York, hacking away at romance magazines, soft-core porn, westerns, astrology sheets, faux-tabloids ("Wolf Baby Born to Vampire Teen"), and the like, while wasting my mornings on a novel about my adventures in underpulp, to be called *Eats Corpse for Rare Coin*. Never finished it (thank God).

And I was broke. I wasn't living on peanuts, I was living on shells. Luckily, I had a friend named Clark Dimond, who (as befits a man christened with a name like a pseudonym) was a high priest of low pulp (a few years later, he was to write—anonymously!—the *No-Frills Mystery*, which the New York Times called "a classic of the genre"). Clark, who ran in comic circles (so to speak), knew Archie Goodwin, who was editing a revival of the EC-type comic, designed to bypass the Comics Code by being larger (8 1/2 x 11, or magazine format), more expensive, and black and white—all of

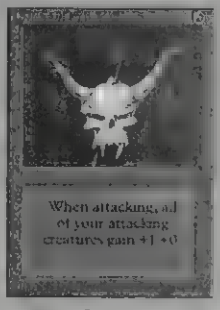
# The Magic Primer
The Gathering

GARFIELD GAMES

## Lesson 2: The Battlefield

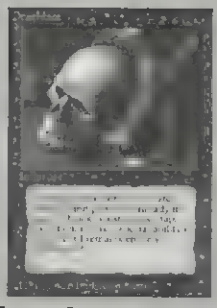
Summoned Creatures

The Library

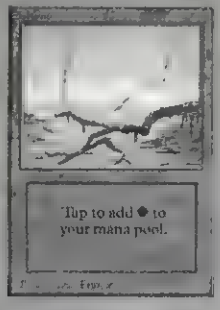



Cast Enchantment

Artifact in play



The Graveyard

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which, presumably, would turn off kids; and all of which, of course, didn't.

Clark and I started scripting for *Creepy* and *Eerie*, the forerunner of today's "illustrated novels," turning in 6-to-12 page tales at $12 a page, which we split. We would come up with a story on the subway after work and block it out over pizza, writing it out like a screenplay *(Long shot of the car; on the hood, where the ornament should have been, the severed head).* Then we'd polish up the dialogue ("No! You're one of *them!* Aaargh!") over a six-pack and a joint while the moon rose over the rooftop water tanks of lower Manhattan.

It was my first byline. What a thrill it was to see our names in tiny type, smaller than the back of a bus ticket, usually misspelled! We were a team, like Rodgers and Hart, Woodward and Bernstein, Lennon and McCartney. We took, and failed, the Marvel test, but that didn't faze us. Marvel had a whole different concept: the art came first, and the dialogue was added later, which went against our instincts. *Creepy* and *Eerie* (Warren magazines) suited us better.

Then good times overtook us. Clark went to work cranking out men's adventure mags, while I got a job as a packager for a Long Island firm that did imitations of established magazines. Remember *Cracked*, which was to *Mad* as The Monkees were to the Beatles? That was us. *True Intimate Confessions* was all mine. So was *Your Intimate Horoscope.* But the one that I enjoyed most, and the one that earned me a footnote in comic history, was a shameless *Creepy* and *Eerie* knock-off we called *Web of Horror.*

It was a pretty good little book for its short run. Not because I was a great editor (though I wasn't half bad) but because I happened onto a fertile new field of talent, and could call on new artists like Jeff Jones, Bernie Wrightson, Mike Kaluta, Ralph Reese and Bruce Jones; not to mention old-timers such as Frank Brunner and Syd Shores, and new writers like Len Wein.

We only did two issues. Number One had a Jeff Jones cover. Number Two had a Wrightson cover. Ralph Reese was doing the third, which never came out.

The problem was, it was 1969. If you don't remember the year, look it up, and you will understand why I left my plow in the furrow, so to speak, called in sick one morning, and ran off to a commune in Colorado to build geodesic domes. It seemed like a good idea at the time. Everybody was doing it. As a matter of fact, Clark's still out there, playing electric banjo in the shadow of Sheep Mountain. Me, I'm back in New York, writing for a living.

All of which brings us, in a roundabout fashion, to Kitchen Sink Press, one of the few "underground" comic publishers to make it all the way from the 1960s into the *fin-de-siécle* home-stretch. Their latest offering is a nifty little miniseries called *Flesh Crawlers.*

Not a very imaginative title. Not a very imaginative story, unless you've spent the


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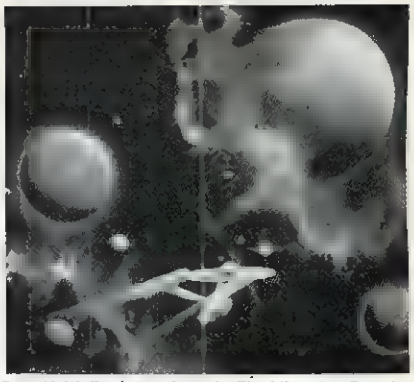

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past 65 years under a culvert, and the idea of shape-shifting BEMs invading Earth is new to you.

And yet—why do I like this comic so much? Because it reminds me, shamelessly and shiningly, of the Good Old Days, before comics became lowered to stupid superhero tricks, or so elevated that the storytelling got lost in the special effects. Originality is not, after all, what we ask of the primal ooze. What we want is taste, smell, substance; and *Flesh Crawlers* delivers what my hero R.A. Lafferty would call, "the high old authentic stuff."

*Flesh Crawlers* comes from the writer-artist team of Richard Rainey and Michael Dubisch. It is a 32-page black-and-white that will run in three issues, published bi-monthly, starting this August (1993). The story begins with a man and woman on their way to a born-again Christian retreat in upstate New York, where she hopes he will quit drinking. They have a "strange encounter" at a rest area apparently used by flying saucers as well as cars; a second encounter takes place when the man sneaks into the woods to pop a can of beer and meets up with his superbly sexy "old girl friend."

Or...is she? (Or as Dylan once said ..."Honey, do you have to ask?)

The series looks promising. Rainey and Dubisch have set up a web of sub-plots involving the local cops and a bored lolita teen, a faith healer surprised at his own success, and a top-secret para-military task force of alien-hunters disguised as long-haul truckers.

The art is the opposite of slick; if it's a little stiff at times, it's always cinematic, and it never loses hold of the story. It grows on you, sort of like Kudzu. It's sometimes banal (the aliens, unfortunately); occasionally brilliant (the born-agains, who are truly alien creatures); and always dense enough to be interesting. For instance, all the car doors have insides. I like that.

Kitchen Sink says the series is for *all ages*, which bothered me at first, until I realized they meant the demented of all ages. So check out *Flesh Crawlers*. It's guaranteed to take you back to the good old days. When comics were comics and pizza was a quarter a slice. And flesh crawled. ■

## Recent and Recommended

•This month, comic book fans will get a chance to determine whether filmmaker Spike Lee has done the right thing when the first title in his new line of comics debuts. The controversial director of *She's Got To Have It* and *X* begins his comic book career with *Floaters* (Dark Horse, 32 pages, $2.50), set in an alternate world where all drugs are legal and urban warfare is a way of life. The series, which combines science fantasy with social commentary, is written by Sean Fagan and Spike's brother Cinque Lee, and illustrated by Lance Tooks. The catalyst for the

*Continued on page 97*


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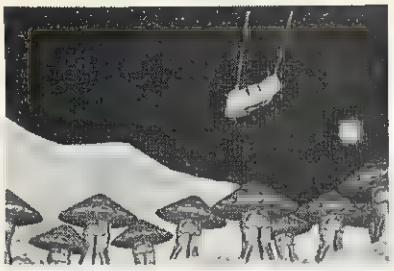

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# MOVIES

*Continued from page 23*

pregnancy unless you have a license. The ethnicity has pretty much been beaten out of the world, so everybody is the same."

Silver admits he enjoyed tinkering with the film's futuristic design elements.

"*Star Trek* is set in the 23rd century. Our film is set 20 or 30 years in the future. General Motors provided us with the molds from one of their concept cars of the future. You've never seen them before. Usually in movies set in the future, you'll see vehicles that are some Hollywood designer's idea of a car of the future. The police car in our movie is designed off a car GM refers to as the Ultra Light, which is a car made of carbon fiber that weighs 1400 pounds and gets 100 miles to the gallon. We created 10 of those cars. Again, it's not a rinky-dink, wimpy car; when that car pulls up and the doors open, it looks strong and solid."

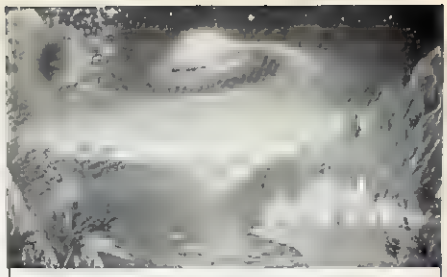
Asked why he handed the directorial reins on a $30 million movie ("less salaries," he confides) to a first-time director, Silver's response is nothing if not self-assured. "Marco is a talented guy. I've always had good luck finding talented young directors. I have this series on HBO called *Tales From the Crypt*, and I'm always seeing young, new people for that. One of the reasons I do the series is to have that access. I saw Marco's commercial reel and it was very impressive. I met him and we started working on another project together. When *Demolition Man* came along, I shifted him over to this one."

It was Silver's "supersalesmanship" that finally convinced Sylvester Stallone to commit to *Demolition Man*, even though he had previously passed on the project.

"After *Oscar* and *Stop, or My Mom Will Shoot!* I said to myself, 'You've got to take a chance,'" Stallone explains. "But I decided it wasn't enough for me to just do an action film, I wanted to do something that had never been done before. Challenges are getting very hard to find. So this film was perfect. It's an extremely unique concept. But it's a questionable film in that if it's not executed properly, it could be silly."

Stallone refers to his character as a "superpoliceman. He's a man who tends to break things; in other words, he does whatever it takes to catch a guy. Blow up a building, tear a pier out, run a truck through a wall—he'll do it. So he's gotten this nickname, Demolition Man. Wesley Snipes frames me and we're both frozen into the future. What makes it interesting is, the future's very passive and quiet, and we bring this stupid, 1990's mentality to this new world. We handle things physically, whereas the people in 2036 handle everything mentally. So I think it makes for a good contrast."

Thus far, Stallone's least favorite scene in *Demolition Man* is the one where he is cryogenically frozen. "They put me in a giant,

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glass pod that weighs close to 2,000 pounds. Then they lowered the lid and filled it up with this blue fluid, stopping it about one inch from the top. I said to myself, 'If this keeps up, I'm gone.' Even though it had safety releases, if those safety releases break, you're dead, you're gone. When I look at the dailies and see the fear on my face, I realize that this is really movie-making."

Comments Brambilla later, "If you were forcibly put into a very small, enclosed space which is then filled with glycerine, I don't think you'd be very happy, either. It must have been very claustrophobic for Sly, although we did take a lot of precautions by using a top that was very lightweight and having four people standing by ready to lift it off in case anything went wrong. We only did two or three takes; I wanted to get Sly out of there pretty quickly."

The easy part of making *Demolition Man* for Stallone has been "the physical stuff. I understand that part of making movies, I like it, and I'm not afraid of new challenges. If you get hurt, you get hurt. The difficult part is that the script is very specific. The people in this future speak in a very weird tongue. Instead of saying 'calm down,' they'll say, 'please withdraw your hormones.' So I had to get into that kind of speech rhythm. It's like dealing with a space creature from another planet."

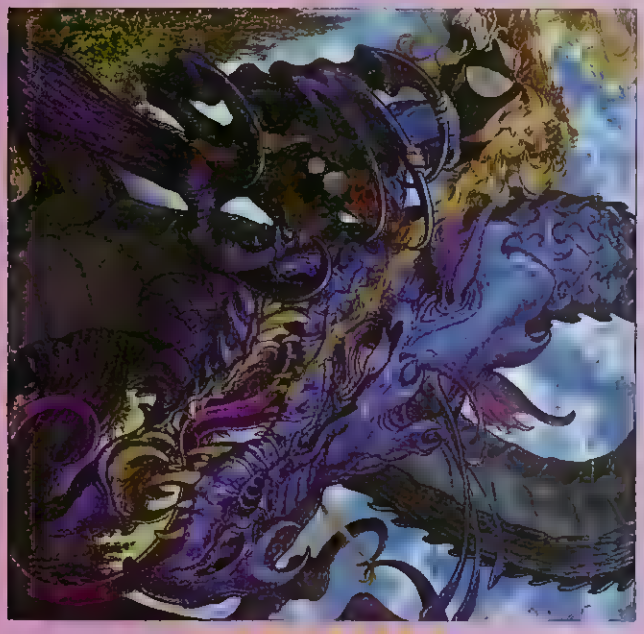
The actor believes that *Demolition Man* has the potential to evolve into a long-running film series. "I think *Demolition Man* could be a fantastic, ongoing series like *Batman* or *Rambo*. I'm already thinking about where the character could go. I know Joel is thinking along the same lines; he's always saying that he wishes he could find a way to make the sequel without making the first movie."

*Simon Phoenix (Wesley Snipes), visits a museum to steal the future's only weapons.*

For Marco Brambilla, getting this complex and demanding film finished is his number one priority at the moment. His personal hopes for *Demolition Man* lie beyond mere box-office success. "You can show people all the commercial reels in the world, but until you've actually made a movie with actors and all the complicated things associated with it, they tend not to take you very seriously. So this will be very good for me in that respect and will allow me to do other projects that I want to do."

Wesley Snipes sizes up Brambilla's promise in another way. Says he, returning to the set, "Look out for Marco Brambilla. He's gonna be a bad cat." □


Stephen has painted many memorable Dragons over the years and these two are a sample of those we have. There will be more to come.



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*By Adam-Troy Castro*

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*Will you save the desert world of* Dune? *Or will you destroy it? You get to choose!*

*DUNE* IS, OF COURSE, A CLASSIC SF NOVEL BY Frank Herbert, encompassing mysticism, environmentalism, and Machiavellian intrigue on the desert planet known as both Arrakis and Dune. An incredibly hostile planet almost completely devoid of water, Dune is the only known source of the addictive spice known as Melange, which happens to be the backbone of the galaxy's economy. Herbert's novel was a stupendous feat of world-making, densely packed with so many fresh concepts and unfamiliar terms that it came equipped with its own glossary. It was also a major cult hit that inspired a generation of writers, spawned five best-selling sequels and, inevitably, attracted the interest of Hollywood.

*Dune* is also a notorious flop movie directed by David Lynch, who got the assignment only after a list of other failed attempts over the course of two decades. Most critics considered it an incoherent mess. Science fiction fans and readers familiar with Herbert's novel were usually kinder than mainstream audiences, who found the movie boring, confusing, and pointless; it is today remembered as a major disaster.

The new computer game *Dune II: The Building of a Dynasty* (Westwood Studios, Virgin Games), owes more to the Lynch film than the Herbert novel, but you don't have to be familiar with either (or the previous *Dune* game) to play. Strictly speaking, the science fictional content is minimal; it's really just a strategic war scenario in which three noble Houses fight land battles over the forbidding landscape of Arrakis. But *Dune II* is one of the most enjoyable computer games I've ever encountered.

Following a very user-unfriendly download (the game designers seem to feel that on-screen instructions are for wimps), beginning players can choose whether to join the noble Atreides, the conniving Ordos, or the vile and treacherous Harkonnen. In practical terms, this choice doesn't make much difference until late in the game, when each House gets its most advanced secret weaponry; but that doesn't stop even the cosmetic differences from being amusing. For instance, each House has a Mentat (human computer), who gives them their assignments and provides hints along the way; and each Mentat speaks in a voice true to that House's character. The Atreides Mentat, Cyril, is a heroic, gallant, but ultimately boring noble, who regards the conquest of Dune as a holy duty; and the Harkonnen Mentat, Radnor, is a beady-eyed, scheming, hand-wringing little slug, who snarls at you contemptuously when you lose a battle.

Nothing stops you from trying out each House in turn, but I had to start somewhere, and so it came to pass that when the lady from the mystical Bene Gesserit society appeared on screen to ask me which House I wanted to choose, I took my cue from the film. I remembered the late actor Kenneth McMillan playing the evil Baron Harkonnen as a bloated fat man whose greatest joy in life, aside from plotting evilly, was having the pus drained from his gigantic facial boils. I immediately threw my lot in with the Harkonnen, which wouldn't surprise anybody who knows me a bit. (The lady from the Bene Gesserit reacted by lowering her eyes mournfully as she signed me up.)

Then comes the fun part: the battle. You start with a few armored vehicles, some infantry, and a small construction facility on one of the rocky outcroppings that present Dune's only stable landscape. This isn't enough to even defend yourself, let alone conquer the enemy, so you have to quickly develop the resources you need to build an unstoppable fighting force. The game provides you with enough funds to get started—essentially enough to build a wind powered generator, a radar outpost, and the first of the spice refineries that will provide you sufficient income to continue.

You won't even be finished with this before the first enemy foot soldiers start showing up to tear down all you've built. You have to fight them off, of course, but a purely defensive game will get you killed. You also have to send some of your armies to explore the landscape around you, since the game blacks out everything you haven't yet seen; sooner or later you're going to have to find and destroy the enemy base, since they're churning out the tanks they're going to use to grind you to rubble.

But until then, your most important priority is to venture out into the desert itself; even though that means risking a fatal encounter with the giant tunneling sandworms, which like to come up and swallow things on the surface. You won't last much longer if you don't find the great fields of red sand that indicate spice, the backbone of Dune's economy. Since spice is money on Dune, if you don't find any within the first few minutes of play,

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you'll run out of resources and get overrun in very short order. When you do find a spice field, you have to dispatch one of the maddeningly slow spice harvesting vehicles to lumber out and get it—with no guarantee that it won't get destroyed by enemy forces or eaten by a worm before it comes back. All this while the enemy infantry is firing on your refinery, in an attempt to keep you from profiting from your find....

Like all good war games, *Dune II* is a strategic juggling act, much more complicated than simply moving a cursor and pressing the fire buttton on your joystick. Each individual battle, which can last hours, requires you to keep close track of dozens of separate factors at once, all taking place at the same time, on a landscape many times too large to see on your computer screen at one time. For instance, let's suppose you've made it to a much later point in the battle. You've managed to locate the enemy base in the south and have sent five combat tanks and an infantry unit on a suicide mission to hit their power generators with everything they have got. They're outnumbered at the site, so they might not be enough to do the job; you've already got a second force on the way, but they won't arrive until long after your first group is shrapnel. It's quite possible that the enemy will repair all the damage before you even get there and make you have to fight the same battle all over again.

Meanwhile, back at your own base, a group of enemy infantry has just destroyed one of your wind powered generators. This leaves you without enough power to use your radar. Your radar screen contracts to the size of a dot. In a few seconds your base will be defenseless before the enemy. You scroll across the landscape in search of reinforcements (unable to find any quickly because you don't have your radar) and, bang, locate one of your tanks, which you somehow failed to notice, idling without orders on an undisputed rock outcropping halfway across the desert. You vaguely remember sending it there to escort a spice harvester half an hour ago. Feeling annoyed at yourself for not noticing this earlier, you order the tank back to your base to provide assistance, knowing it won't get there until too late.

You then scroll back to the base and click your cursor on the heavy vehicle factory, ordering it to whip up a nice instant tank for you. Precious seconds later, you have something to throw against the invader. But building that tank cost you the last money you had; you're going to need more armaments, and a new wind generator, and that means you're going to need some more spice soon so you can pay for them. You scroll across the map to find out how your harvesters are doing (mumbling to yourself because radar would have really made this a heck of a lot easier), and find two of them happily scooping up spice in a distant part of desert. One of the harvesters is only 7 percent full, which won't help you much; the other is 40 percent


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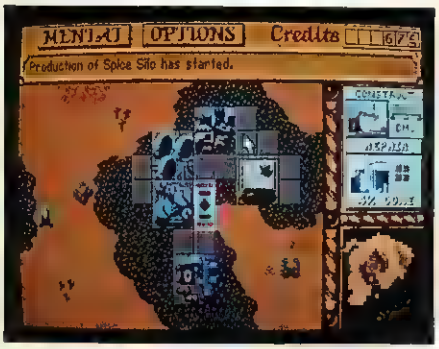
full, which would pay for a new generator.

Noting that this particular spice field is almost depleted and won't be worth harvesting much longer, you click the cursor over the vehicle that's 40 percent full and order its crew to return to base. It won't arrive for some time; the harvesters are great lumbering things that look like UPS trucks. Air mail they're not. That's part of the challenge.

You scroll back to your outpost to confirm that it's still under attack. On the plus side, another harvester you sent home long ago




*The production of "Spice" is essential to surviving the game in* Dune II.

is just now lumbering into the loading dock, which means you'll have some spare money very soon. And you spot one of the enemy tanks getting swallowed whole by a worm. You scroll back to the enemy outpost and find your second wave assaulting its walls under heavy fire....

Well, obviously, there's plenty of stuff to keep track of here, more than enough to keep your attention for the several hours a typical battle lasts. And it only gets more complicated in future engagements, when more advanced weaponry comes into play. The House of Atreides gets aid from the native Fremen; the Ordos have a nerve gas missile that can confuse enemies or even temporarily change their loyalty. My favorite is the Harkonnen cluster bomb, a savage weapon that rips the living daylights out of the enemy.

My only real complaint: nowhere in any of this does the game factor in the planet's notorious aridity. That was a constant concern in *Dune* the book, where the Fremen had to recycle their wastes and collect dew just to stay alive. The game is hard enough even without having this to worry about, but still, the question of thirst would have more solidly connected it to the universe of Herbert's novels. But that's not enough to sink the game, which I found as dangerously addictive as Melange itself. □

## Recent and Recommended

•Fans of Luke Skywalker, Hans Solo and Princess Leia Organa are a hungry group, not satisfied to get by only on the three films made by George Lucas. In 1992, Dark Horse Comics, with the full endorsement and cooperation of Lucasfilm, released a new adventure in the *Star Wars* saga, one that took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place six years after the film *Return of the Jedi*. So popular was this new comic book adventure that it has now been turned into a roleplaying game that continues the cosmic saga. In *Star Wars Dark Empire Sourcebook* (West End Games, hardcover, 128 pages, $25.00), designed to be used with *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*, Imperial forces once again control much of the galaxy and are bringing the battle to the homeworlds of the Republic itself. Swearing allegiance to a dead emperor, enemy forces are bringing terror and destruction to our heroes' turf. Michael Allen Horne translated the Tom Veith written story into RPG form. The volume is well-produced and user friendly, with many top-notch illustrations by Dave Dorman and Cam Kennedy taken directly from the comic.

•A welcome addition to the dinosaur fever sweeping the nation is *Dinosaur Adventure* (Knowledge Adventure, Inc., MSRP $49.95), a natural history museum crammed onto three high density disks. This dinosaur cornucopia is loaded with so much in the way of pictures, text, sound, and full motion-video that it bills itself as an Interactive Book. This isn't a game with winners and losers, but rather an aural and visual encyclopedia that provides a colorful entertainment that will leave all players winners. This *Lifestyles of the Rich and Scaly* will take you back through time to find out how the dinosaurs evolved, lived and died. You'll discover everything from how they raised and cared for their young to the various theories as to why they vanished. This voyage of exploration won the 1993 Excellence in Software Award for Best Elementary Education Program. From the creation of the earth that formed their home through the discovery of their existence only 150 years ago, *Dinosaur Adventure* will be the first time you ever learned about dinosaurs from a mouse.

•With *Aliens 3* (Acclaim), a Game Pak for the Super Nintendo, you'll be able to move from merely watching the third installment in the hit series to actually living it. The graphics and music faithfully re-create the gritty mood of the movie, and the animation brings you one step closer to virtual reality.

In this game, you control Ripley through several stages, each of which includes seven or more missions that have you accomplishing certain tasks to protect the prison planet, such as destroying alien eggs, sealing pipes and doors, and freeing prisoners. You'll have the use of three different weapons to help you stay alive: a grenade launcher, a flamethrower, and a machine gun. As you move through the cavernous and deadly hallways, you'll also be able to orient yourself by scanning blueprints that are available at intermittent terminals. The difficulty level can be set to provide a challenge for the veteran gamer, the beginner, and those in between. *Aliens 3* is an extremely sophisticated Game Pak that some will consider more fun than the namesake movie that spawned it.

•Frederick Pohl's novels centered around the vanished Heechee civilization and their superscientific technology were so popular that his novel *Gateway* spawned many sequels. It was probably to be expected, therefore, that the computer game based on that novel should do the same. After Legend Entertainment's success with their first *Gateway* computer game, in which you played a prospector in the search of the fruits of the abandoned Heechee artifacts and ended up (if you won the game) buying time for earth against the Heechee's ancient enemy, the gaming company picks up the action 10 years later, in 2112.

In *Gateway II: Homeworld*, you must stop a fanatical cult which intends to invite that same old Heechee enemy to destroy the earth in a purifying fire. Once more you must become humanity's only hope for survival, as you discover new worlds, experience new adventures and, if you're lucky, cross the event horizon of a black hole to track down the Heechee homeworld. A hint book is included in case you're stumped, and can't, for example, figure out how to operate the Genetic Inducer, or escape the ravenous dinosaurs. If you took our advice earlier this year, you've already purchased and played the first *Gateway* and so will know what we mean when we tell you that Legend Entertainment has produced another winner.

**Trevor S. Vartanoff**


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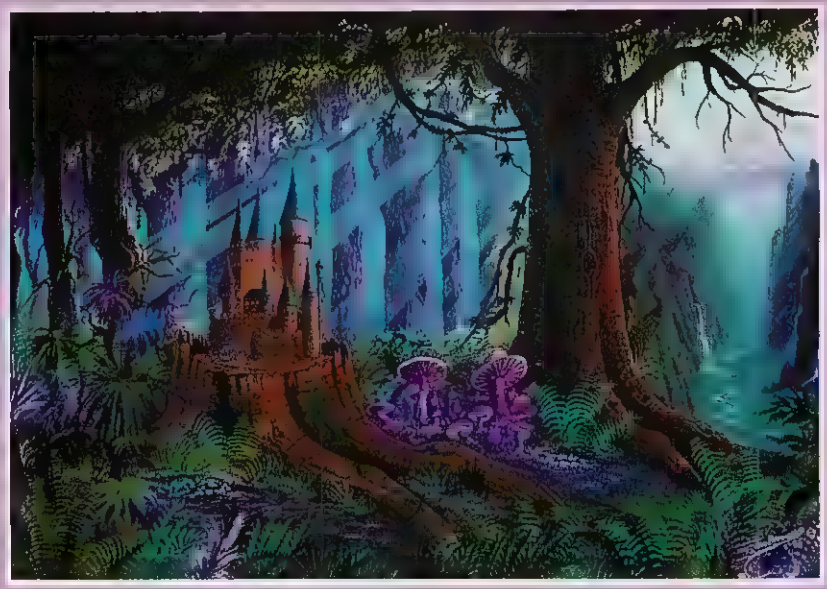

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# Comics

*Continued from page 89*

tale is an extremely addictive drug, Cloud Seven, which causes the user to begin to float. When the inventor of the drug is struck down after discovering a side effect of a deadly new form of the drug, it is up to the scientist's star pupil to unravel the mystery surrounding the manufacture of the new deadly strain..

•Don't panic! It's just Arthur Dent, that hapless bathrobe-clad last survivor of planet Earth, appearing for the first time in comic book form after a smash success in books, radio and television. Ever since our planet was destroyed by the Vogons to make way for a hyperspace bypass (or hadn't you noticed?), Douglas Adams' SF satire has been a success in whichever medium it appeared, so there's no reason to suspect that *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (DC Comics, prestige format, $4.95), won't be as big a hit in four-color format. Adams has personally supervised the production of this three issue miniseries, which is written by John Carnell, and drawn by Steve Leialoha, Steven Baskerville and Art Nicols. Take a wild romp through a bewildering comic universe populated with such oddballs as the two-headed Zaphod Beeblebrox and a manic-depressive robot named Marvin. The creators of this series have managed to capture Adams' manic humor, so don't leave the planet without it.

•Next time Boris Yeltsin comes to the United States in search of the secrets of capitalism, he could find no better tutors than Wendy and Richard Pini. This wife and husband team helped pioneer the concept of independently published comic books in the late '70s, turning their creation *Elfquest* from a cult fantasy-adventure series into one which has sold millions of copies of both comics and graphic novel collections. Their fans have been loyal ones, ever eager for new tales of Cutter, Skywise and the others. But up until now, the *Elfquest* output has been limited to what the team could produce on their own, Wendy and Richard co-plotting, she doing the drawings and he handling the business affairs. Now, for the first time, the Pinis are letting others into their playground. *Elfquest: New Blood* (Warp Graphics/Father Tree Press, 160 pages, full color, hardcover, $19.95) collects tales written and drawn by other comics creators, giving us unique looks for the first time of what was a personal vision to begin with. John Byrne, Terry Collins, Lea Hernandez, Barry Blair, Gary Kato and others have all brought the best of their own talents to bear in their differing takes on the *Elfquest* legend. The Pinis are to be applauded, not only for turning an individual dream into a creative and commercially successful empire, but also for inviting others to their party.

**S.E.**


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# SCIENCE

*Continued from page 30*

as a way of transforming the abstract models and equations of science into experienced reality.

**SF AGE:** So if you took me into the lab, Creve, and gave me a state of the art VR experience, what would I "see" and "feel"? What would the environment be?

**MAPLES:** We use a device called a BOOM which the viewer can hold to their eyes. It's on a counter-balanced mechanical arm so the viewer is free to look and move around. Inside there are small TV screens (currently only two-color) and associated optics. It operates like a head-mounted display except you don't have to wear anything. Your position is tracked by mechanical encoders in your arm. It's like a modern version of Sutherland's "Sword of Damocles." Our system, called MUSE, also utilizes sound in several different ways — as object cues (something falls and you can hear it), as environmental cues (the pitch of an engine changing as you speed up), for voice (the computer talks to you), and for the audio mapping of information (hear, for example, temperature variations). Since we are developing a more natural human-computer interface, you can, of course, talk to the computer as well. At all times the viewer can move freely and even fly through the space that's been created.

> Perhaps one of the greatest potentials [of VR] will be in helping us cope with the horrors of the information overload we have created.

**ANDREWS:** The flight around Albuquerque is quite nice...

**MAPLES:** To help you explore the environment, we have created virtual vehicles with different attributes—hovercraft, plane, tethercraft, etc.—that can be altered by voice command. One of our models is a scale model of the solar system.

**SF AGE:** And I'd be able to walk through the solar system, Creve? Touch the planets and so forth?

**MAPLES:** You could fly to the moon Callisto, attach to it, and watch Jupiter rising. If you walked through this model, you'd be very old before you got anywhere interesting. Typically, to move around the solar system model, you need to accelerate to better than 25 times the speed of light.

**ANDREWS:** Attach? The software lets you do that?

**MAPLES:** Yes. In a variety of forms.

**ANDREWS:** Is this commercially available or just research?

**MAPLES:** At the moment it's applied research involving software we have copyrighted. We hope to move it into the public arena.

**ANDREWS:** Not licensed? Too bad.

**MAPLES:** Let me try to paint a picture that I experienced. Imagine flying through the solar system toward Jupiter at translight speeds. About a million miles out you encounter Callisto. You slow down, fly towards the moon and attach or "tether" to it. It is rotating beneath you, but you are moving with it in its orbit around Jupiter. Jupiter is in front of you, enormous, and spinning at incredible speeds. Still tethered, you fly around the moon until you are over its pole. Now you begin to pull away from the moon, flying backwards, facing the pole. The 14 moons of Jupiter form a miniature system of their own, which is tilted with respect to the plane of the solar system. As you accelerate away from (but are still tethered to) Callisto, the entire Jupiter system unfolds beneath you. All the moons dancing in their own peculiar orbits, moving in different direction, around their giant parent and against the backdrop of black space.

**ANDREWS:** A glorious picture, Creve. Are there ships we can shoot at?

**SF AGE:** So how many years of research and how many dollars of funding are required to get us where we want to be?

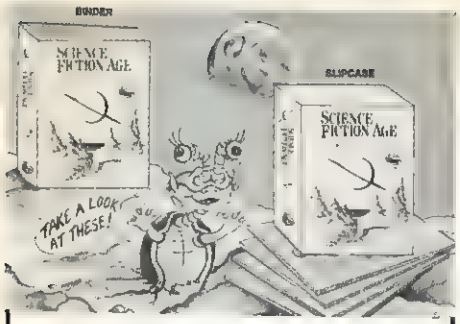
**MAPLES:** There is much research that remains to be done, both technically (VR glasses, specialized graphics components for faster rendering, applying parallel processing, etc.) and from the human factors direction. Expenses are high now because the technology is very new, changing rapidly, and volume is low. However, prices on key components are dropping and will accelerate as the entertainment industry seeks to develop a mass market. Firms like Autodesk and Sense8 are developing PC-based systems. With the advent of 300 MIP chip sets within the next several years, a reasonable VR capability should be practical in the personal range for the individual user. The real challenges are in software development and model construction.

**ANDREWS:** Creve, I take it you're in software development, not the hardware.

**MAPLES:** I deal with both hardware and software, although our prime effort, MUSE, is a hardware-independent, software platform.

**ANDREWS:** Do you foresee that there will be other, transcendental effects beyond those we SF types theorize? Maybe new psychologies? Maybe new cults, even implants. (Or, see my story "Other Heads," in which the interface devices are rings.)

**SF AGE:** Earlier Arlan mentioned that the VCR changed things in ways we couldn't imagine...particularly in — ahem — home

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entertainment and adult films. No one could have predicted that.

**LANDIS:** At the NASA Vision-21 Conference a few months ago, Myron Krueger made an interesting comment at lunch. He said that whenever a new electronics technology comes along, it's the porn industry that is the first to figure out how to make it profitable. Think about it. The VCR spawned the X-rated video; 900 numbers spawned telephone sex. This makes an interesting argument that virtual sex really will be one of the first things developed for VR.

**ANDREWS:** Watch out for computer viruses! In the case of verch sex, the hardware will have to be very good.

**MAPLES:** In San Francisco, there is a Virtual Reality stage play called "Invisible Site," by George Cotes. It combines live actors with projected 3-D environments. The subject of the plot is—surprise—Virtual Reality. The premise is that in the near future there is a VR subscription network (not unlike the one we are using now) where people can meet and have liaisons, using any type of physical body, in a variety of locations and time periods, real or imagined. The plot thickens when a hacker breaks into the system and plays god with the inhabitants. Just as he reveals himself and declares his ultimate dominance over the participants, he is unseated by a younger hacker with "a faster modem".

**SF AGE:** Let me ask a question about a popular myth of VR. In SF, many folks play with the picture of people who have abandoned "literal reality" for "Virtual Reality", who have become addicted to a new electronic drug. What are your feelings about this? Is this just one of the latest anti-science myths?

**LANDIS:** Heck, I know people who have abandoned reality for science fiction!

**ANDREWS:** I'm one.

**MAPLES:** My son, 23, is in college studying art. He is very seriously concerned about this possibility — that VR could further isolate people from each other, inhibit learning and communication, dull the mind, and lead to another form of addictive escape.

**SF AGE:** And what do you tell him, Creve?

**MAPLES:** Computer programming forms sort of an analogy. Everyone knows that programmers (often the most creative ones) are a weird breed. People have difficulty understanding them (especially managers). They partially live in a world of their own.

**LANDIS:** A more logical world, where things do exactly what you tell them (whether you want them to or not).

**MAPLES:** What they actually do is create worlds in which they get to define the rules. They get to play god. This is pretty heady stuff — and addicting to many people.

**ANDREWS:** So perhaps Verch machines will require a learner's permit, then a driver's license?

**MAPLES:** It's a lot more pleasant to play

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in a world where you make the rules than one in which you may not even understand the game.

**ANDREWS:** Our reality is created by those who are still learning.

**MAPLES:** I think VR will have its share of lost souls, but new advances usually do. Take arsonists and couch potatoes, for example.

**ANDREWS:** Creve, we didn't expect word processing from computer science, and we didn't expect VR. What's beyond the horizon?

**MAPLES:** Technically, I think there will be a number of unexpected side effects. Furness at the University of Washington, for example, is working with laser diode scanners that project images directly on the retina (getting close to neural connections). Sociologically, I think VR will provide breakthroughs in the areas of education and training, particularly when applied to mentally, emotionally, or physically-disadvantaged individuals. Psychologically, I think the ability to "transform" will have a profound impact in learning and understanding. I think it will also open doorways into how the mind works and how we experience the real world. Perhaps one of the greatest potentials will be in helping us cope with the horrors of the information overload we have created. Society is sinking under the onslaught of the information age. Burnout is rampant. No wonder people (such as the Branch Davidians or drug users) seek to escape to simpler environments. Information and knowledge increase far faster than we can absorb them — pressure and feelings of futility increase. If applied correctly, VR taps natural and parallel channels into the human mind, both conscious and subconscious. You can learn again as a child, by experiencing information. Absorbing what we need or want to know can become easier, more natural, and fun, and return to us the enthusiasm and magic of youth — the questing mind.

**ANDREWS:** The "sense of wonder" from a box. I love it.

**MAPLES:** Connect a VR environment to the information highway of the future (plug into the Library of Congress or NASA archived space information, for example) and ask whatever you are curious about. Mix in database technology and multimedia capability, and information can be presented to you as images, sounds, and environments. Effortlessly explore wherever your mind or curiosity can take you...

**SF AGE:** You make it almost sound as if this is Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* done with technology instead of chemicals...

**ANDREWS:** VR chips will be bootlegged instead of dope.

**MAPLES:** Magic, excitement and sense of wonder has been missing for far too long, both in our educational system and as a part of adult life. And, physically, at least, technology isn't addictive.


# SCIENCE FICTION AGE
## —Back Issues—

**November 1992—**
Fiction by Castro, O'Neill, Malzberg, Andrews, DiFilippo, Nelson, Webb. Gallery written by Ray Bradbury on the art of Robert McCall.

**January 1993—**
Fiction by Disch, Boston/Frazier, Watt-Evans, Landis/Strumolo, Cross, Daniel. Essay by Marion Zimmer Bradley. Gallery–James Gurney–Dinotopia.

**March 1993—**
Fiction by Ellison, Andrews, Bova, Aldridge, Hirsch. Essay by Harlan Ellison. Gallery–Gadget Painters.

**May 1993—**
Fiction by Malzberg, Tilton, Bova, Steele, Anteau. Essay by Robert Silverberg. Gallery–The Works of Wayne Barlow.

**July 1993—**
Fiction by Piers Anthony, Sheffield, Shelley, Hogan, Bisson. Jurassic Park coverage. Gallery of Jim Burns art.

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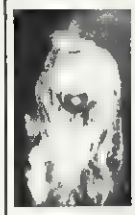

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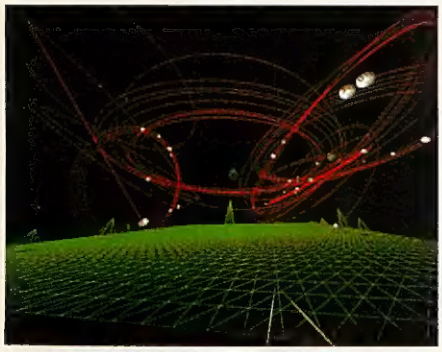
**ANDREWS:** I can see both voluntary, interactive VR and forced VR as possibilities.

**MAPLES:** Forced VR?

**ANDREWS:** For punishment, as in *A Clockwork Orange.*

**SF AGE:** As in enforced mental therapy, Arlan?

**ANDREWS:** Or as other societies are likely to do. What would David Koresh — or Janet Reno — do with involuntary, forced VR?



*A view of the solar system recreated usingVirtual Reality, with the various orbits depicted in red.*

**MAPLES:** But there is no guarantee that you have to learn because you're forced to watch something (TV, for example).

**ANDREWS:** If you couldn't get away for months?

**LANDIS:** I think that the reality will be both less exciting, and less horrifying, than these extremes. People already have the capability to explore virtual worlds that are as diverse as the imagination, as soon as they learn how to read. And Virtual Reality can, in the long run, only slightly moderate the incredible deluge of information that the advent of the computers has opened the floodgates of.

**MAPLES:** I agree, but reading, however pleasurable, is a slow, single-channel access, that many (alas) haven't the patience for. While I think it's wonderful for stimulating the mind and imagination, it's not the best conveyor of information. Our senses didn't become so sophisticated so that we would learn primarily by reading.

**ANDREWS:** I think you've missed what Creve has been saying — natural learning methods will channel the flood like nothing else can.

**LANDIS:** Whether we are ready or not, the information age will soon give every one of 5 billion people potential access to every other one. But do all 5 billion have something to say? And if they do, how do we find time to hear it?

**MAPLES:** My point, perhaps not clearly made, is that every moment of our lives our minds are absorbing vast amounts of information, noncognitively, on parallel channels. It constantly correlates and stores, and superbly filters the uninteresting from the important (subjectively, to be sure). What VR can offer us, however, is perhaps not unlike fire...freedom. □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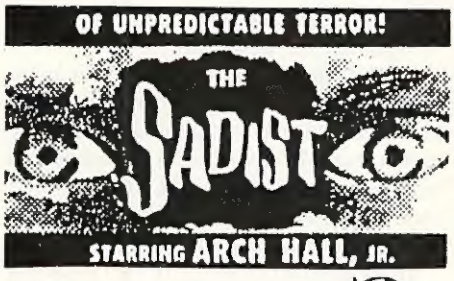


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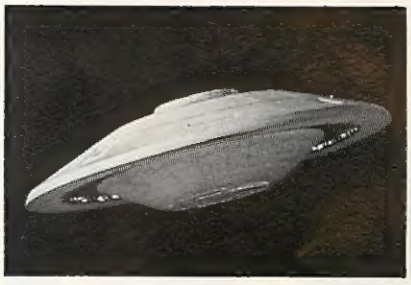

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**DAVID BRIN** HAS WRITTEN SOME OF the most important hard SF novels of the '80s, *Startide Rising*, for which he won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards, and *The Uplift War*, which won a Hugo. Before beginning to publish in 1980, he obtained his B.S. in astronomy and M.S. in applied physics, degrees which have serve him well as he writes stories and novels that manage to be both literate as well as keeping alive the spirit of the best Golden Age space opera.

**Thomas F. Monteleone** has been a professional writer since 1972, and since that time he has turned out 80 short stories and 18 novels. He is adept at both horror and SF, and his most recent novel Blood of the Lamb (Tor) won this years Bram Stoker Award from the Horror Writers of America for Best Novel, and was also chosen as a *New York Times* Book of the Year.His hard-hitting column in *Cemetery Dance*, titled the Mothers and Fathers Italian Association, is a must-read for lovers of the genre.

**Adam-Troy Castro** has just been honored by the readers of *Locus*, who have voted his short story "The Last Robot" (which appeared in our first issue) as their 4th favorite short story of 1992. A collection of his fiction, *Lost in Booth Nine*, will shortly be published by Silver Salamander Press. He will also have a story in Nathan Archer's *Behind the Mask: A Superhero Anthology*, due out next year.

**Daniel Hood** is the art director for an international financial affairs company which helped provide the background for his story in this issue. His short stories have appeared in *Dragon*, and his first novel, a fantasy/mystery titled *Fanuilh*, is scheduled to be released from Berkeley Publishing in May.

**Terry Bisson** comes out of the closet this issue about his career in the comics industry a generation ago. He recently went back into that comics closet once more, and is now scripting a series based on Roger Zelazny's *Amber* series for DC Comics. His short story collection *Bears Discover Fire and Other Stories* will be out this month from Tor.

**Harlan Ellison** has won more awards and is the author of more classic short stories than any other living author. His classic "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" will soon be appearing as a state-of-the-art) computer game from Cyberdreams. He recently shared his often controversial views as a guest on the Tom Snyder show, and his newest short story "Mephisto in Onyx," is attracting considerable attention in Hollywood, according to both *Variety* and Liz Smith's nationally syndicated column.

*Norman Spinrad*

*Phyllis Gotlieb*

**DAVID DRAKE** HAS MADE HIS CAreer on several extremely popular military SF series, the most famous of which is his set of novels about *Hammer's Slammers*, around which he has written six books to date.

In addition to his fiction credits, **James David Audlin** is also a writer, editor, and director for *The Eagle*, and a writer for *The New Phoenix*, both Native American periodicals. He is the Tribal Council Chief for the Free Cherokees.

**Norman Spinrad** has been publishing science fiction for 30 years. His fiction, both riveting and controversial, includes *The Iron Dream*, which portrays a science fiction novel as if written by Adolph Hitler, and a novel about political and journalistic corruption so unsettling to some that it caused the British magazine in which it was first serialized to be banned by bookseller W.H. Smith. His essays have been collected in *Staying Alive* and *Science Fiction in the Real World*.

**Phyllis Gotlieb** is the author of 7 novels, 6 of which are SF, the most recent of which is *Heart of Red Iron*. She has also published four volumes of poetry, a short story collection, and has co-edited an anthology of Canadian SF. Gotlieb is a resident of Toronto.

**Allen Steele** has recently completed his newest novel, *The Jericho Iteration*, which will be published in hardcover by Ace Books in September 1994. His latest short story collection, *Rude Astronauts*, is just out from Old Earth Books. Steele's unofficial guide to Worcester, Massachusetts has allowed most attendees of the annual Readercon to survive New England. □

*Allen Steele*

*Thomas Monteleone*

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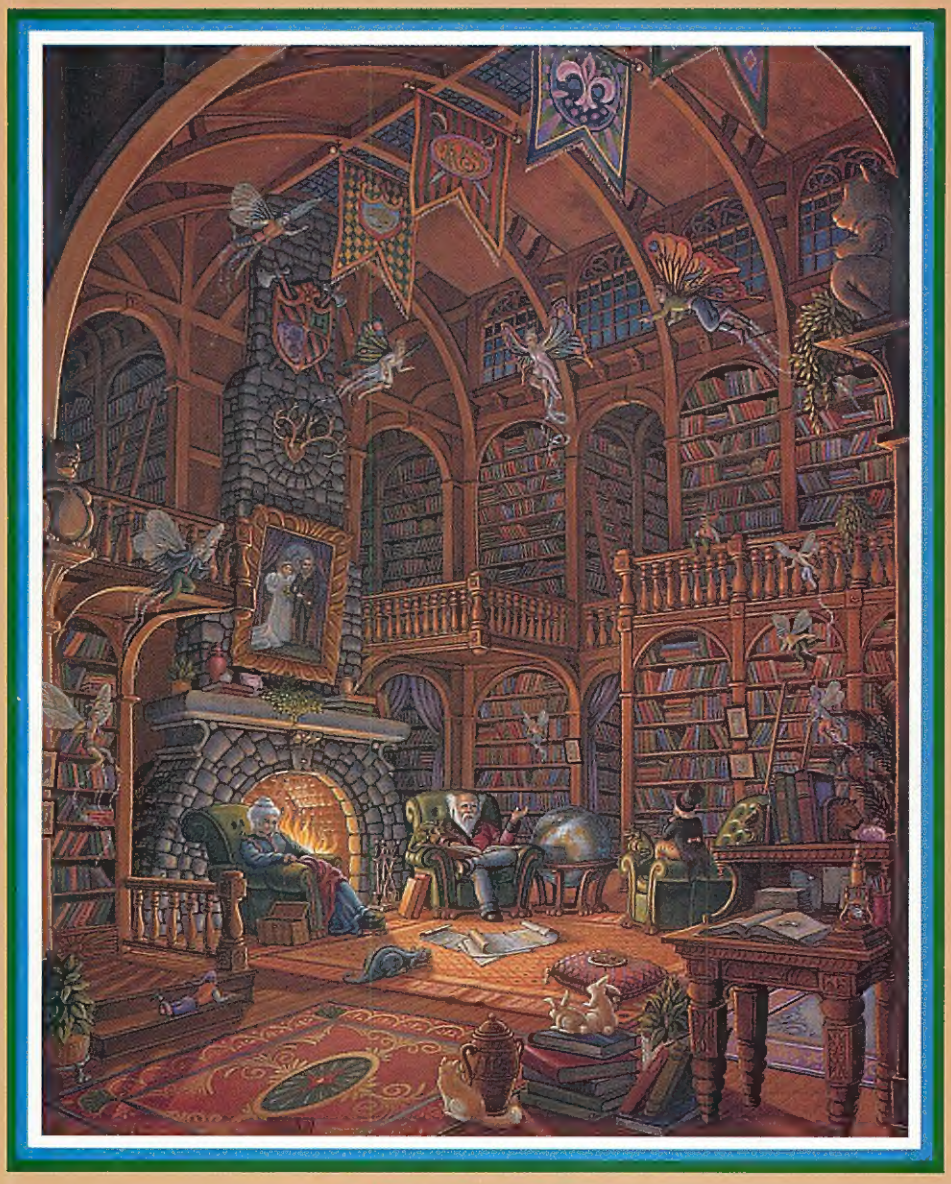

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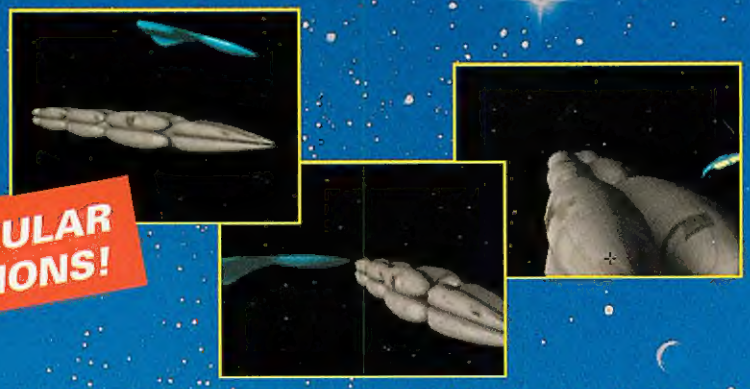

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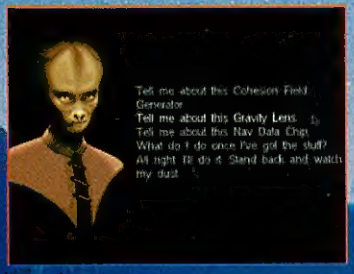


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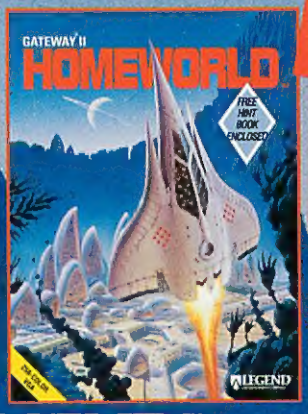


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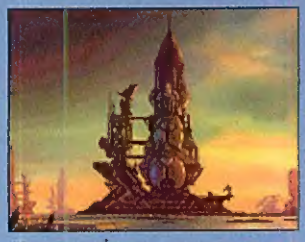

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